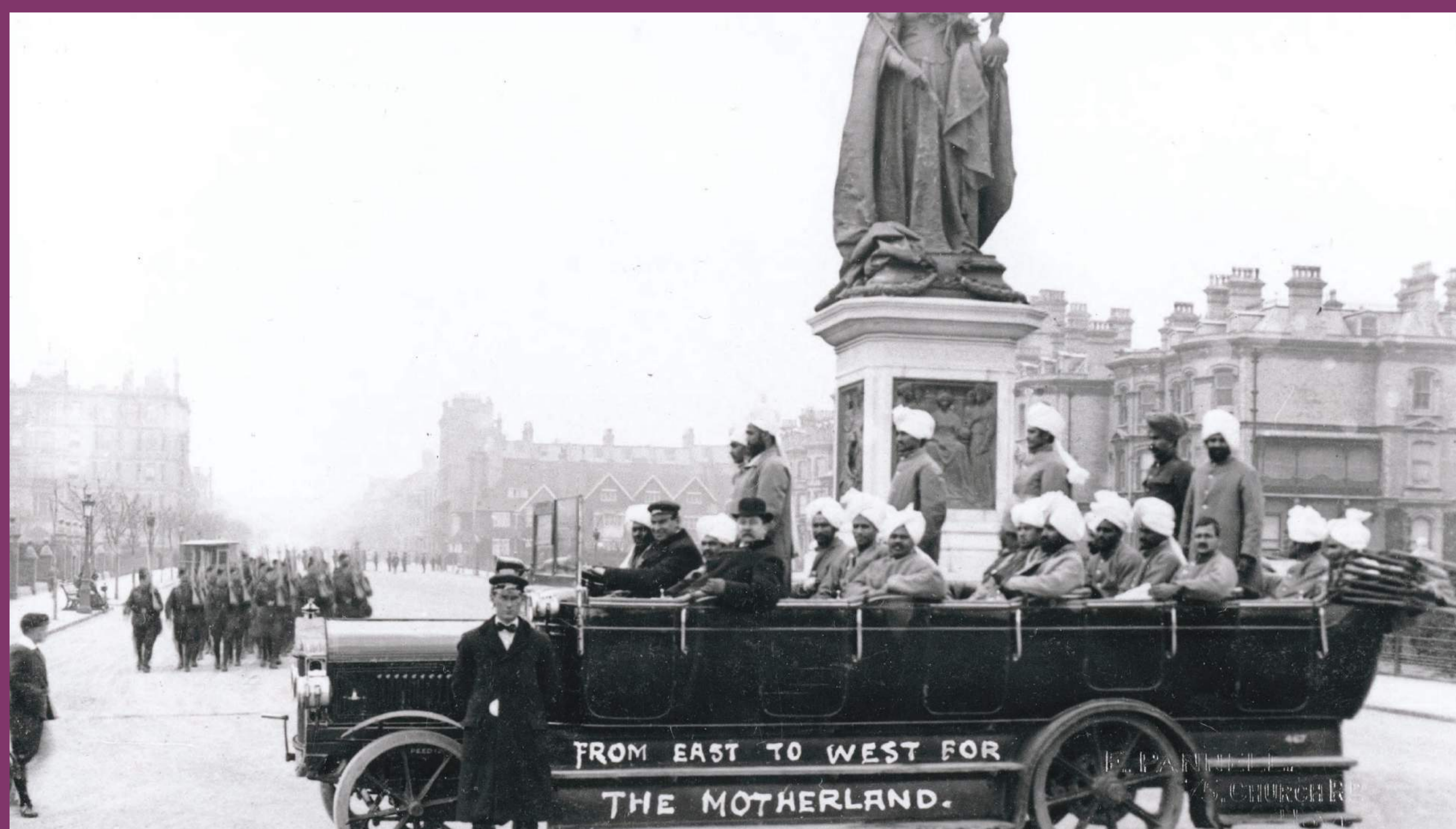


JOURNEY FROM HOME

Believe in Me CIC and We Were There Too have created the Journey from Home project funded by The Heritage Lottery Fund. This project has sought to research and make accessible the stories and experiences of the men from many faiths (Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus) that came from South Asia and were part of the British forces during the First World War. Those stories and experiences have been used for reflection and to inspire discussions around identity, sacrifice, community and Remembrance for community groups in the UK today.

This project is about understanding the shared experiences of the men from South Asia from the different faiths, who are more usually addressed separately despite serving together. We are working with communities and young people to develop their knowledge about the past and how to respond to it creatively today.

The project provides an important link for the current South Asian community to recognise its connection to wider First World War centenary events across the UK in 2018 and for informing British society of the diversity of those that fought. This project is a mix of the past and the present and how journeys can bring communities together.



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Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to all at Holly Lodge High School for ensuring that on this project we are able to share these stories to audiences that never knew about the stories and experiences of these men and women. This project has been funded and supported by the following individuals and organisations:

Letters used in this exhibition have been taken from Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-1918 edited by David Omissi (Macmillan, 1999)

Heritage Lottery Fund
We Were There Too
Holly Lodge High School
National Army Museum
The National Archives
Voices of War and Peace
Hidden Histories
Big Ideas Company
The British Library
Leeds City Museum
National Memorial Arboretum
British Army
Royal Pavilion and Museums, Brighton and Hove

Jasdeep Singh
Dr David Omissi
Dr Priya Atwal
Peter Bance
Dr Jhutti-Johal
Amit and Naroop
Iqbal Hussain
Manny Kaur and Family
Imperial War Museum, London
We are South Asian Sisters Speak
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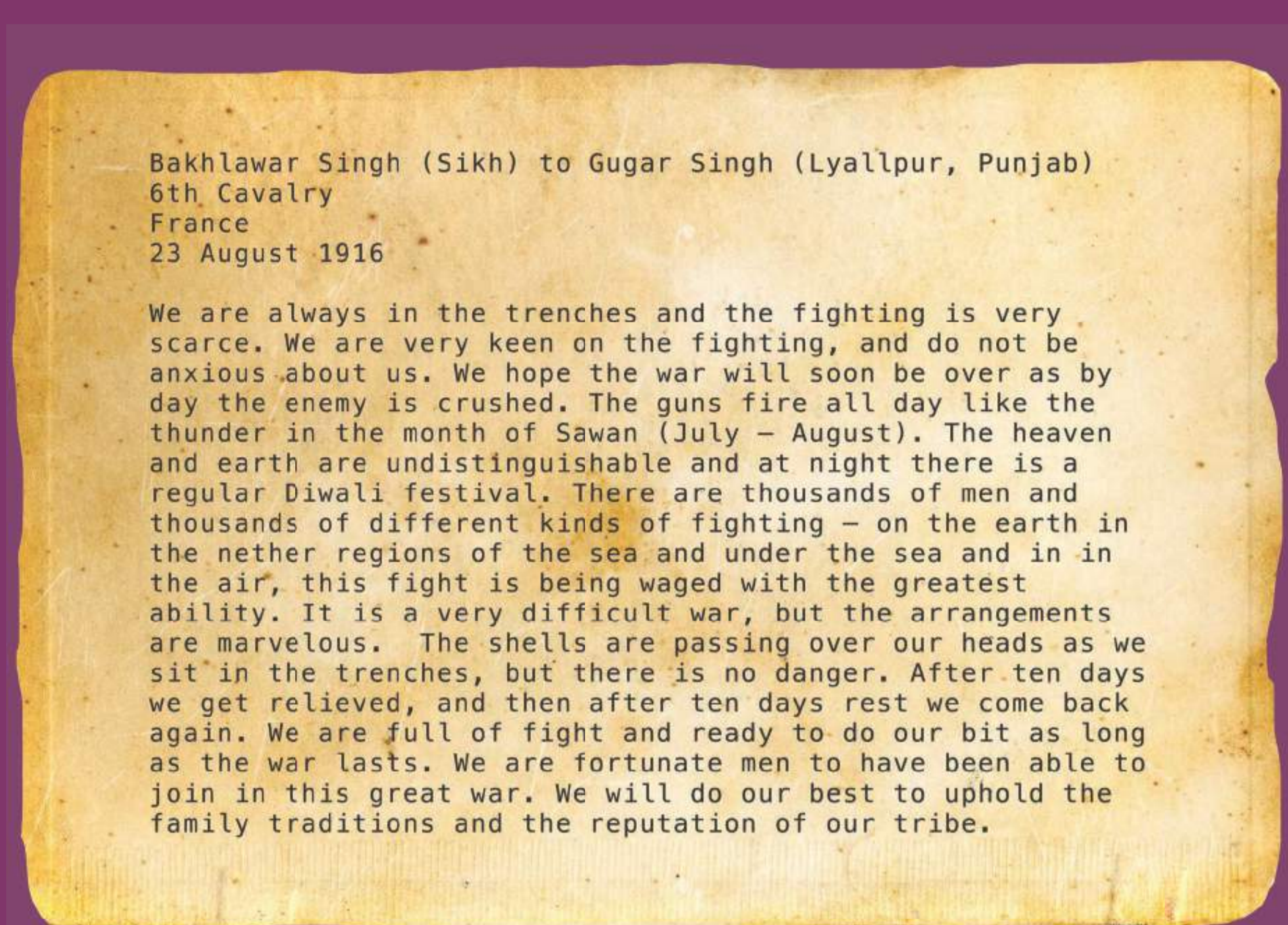
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THE BRITISH INDIAN FORCES

Indian men had been recruited into military units by the British from the days of the East India Company and the practice was more formally regulated and brought under the command of the Crown following the 1857 Indian Rebellion (sometimes called the Indian Mutiny or Sepoy Mutiny). The British actively recruited particular groups such as the Gurkhas and Sikhs, which had remained loyal to Britain during the rebellion. Indian troops were recruited, trained and stationed in India. All the recruits were volunteers and many believed that being a soldier or warrior was a great honour.

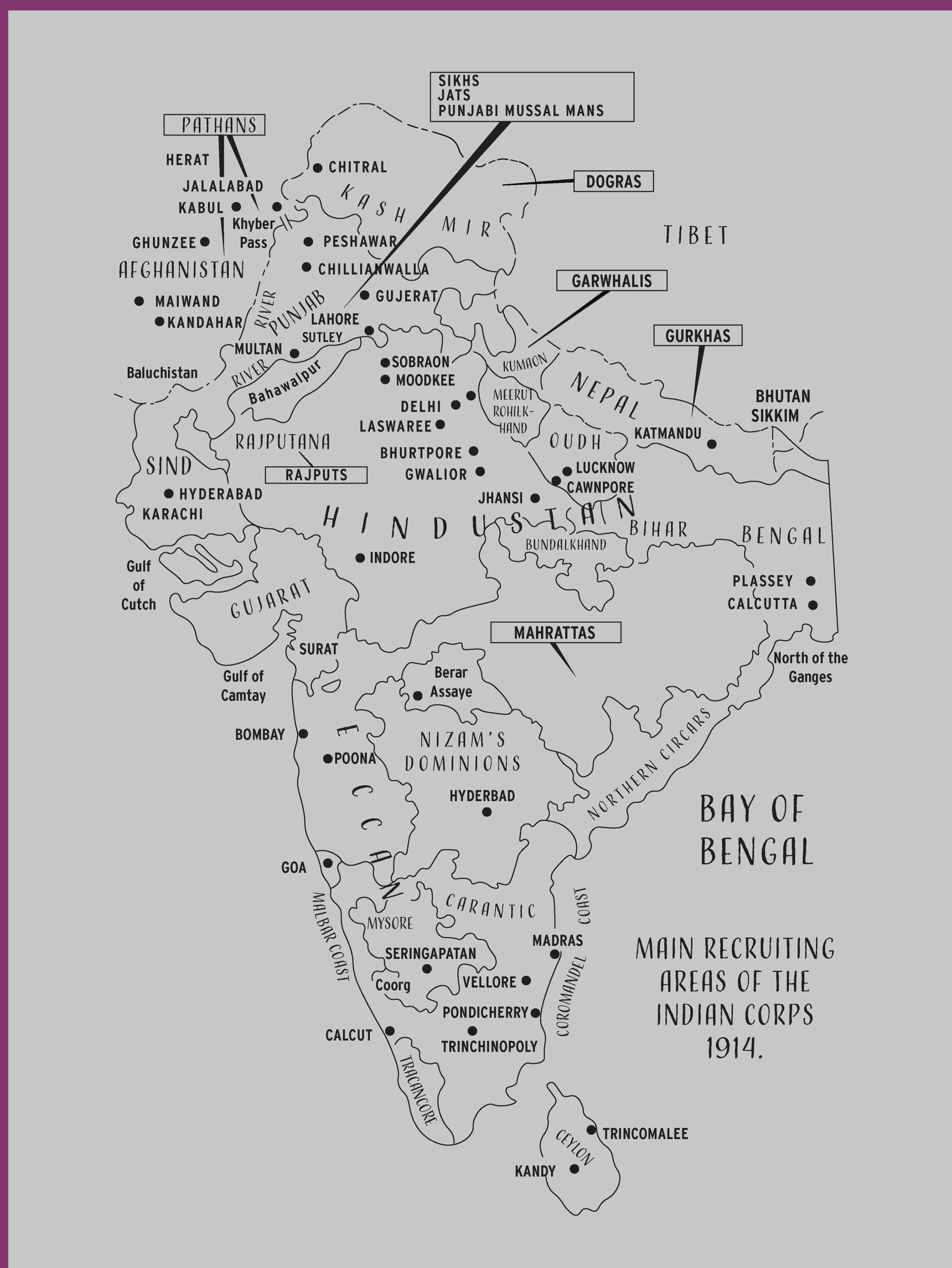


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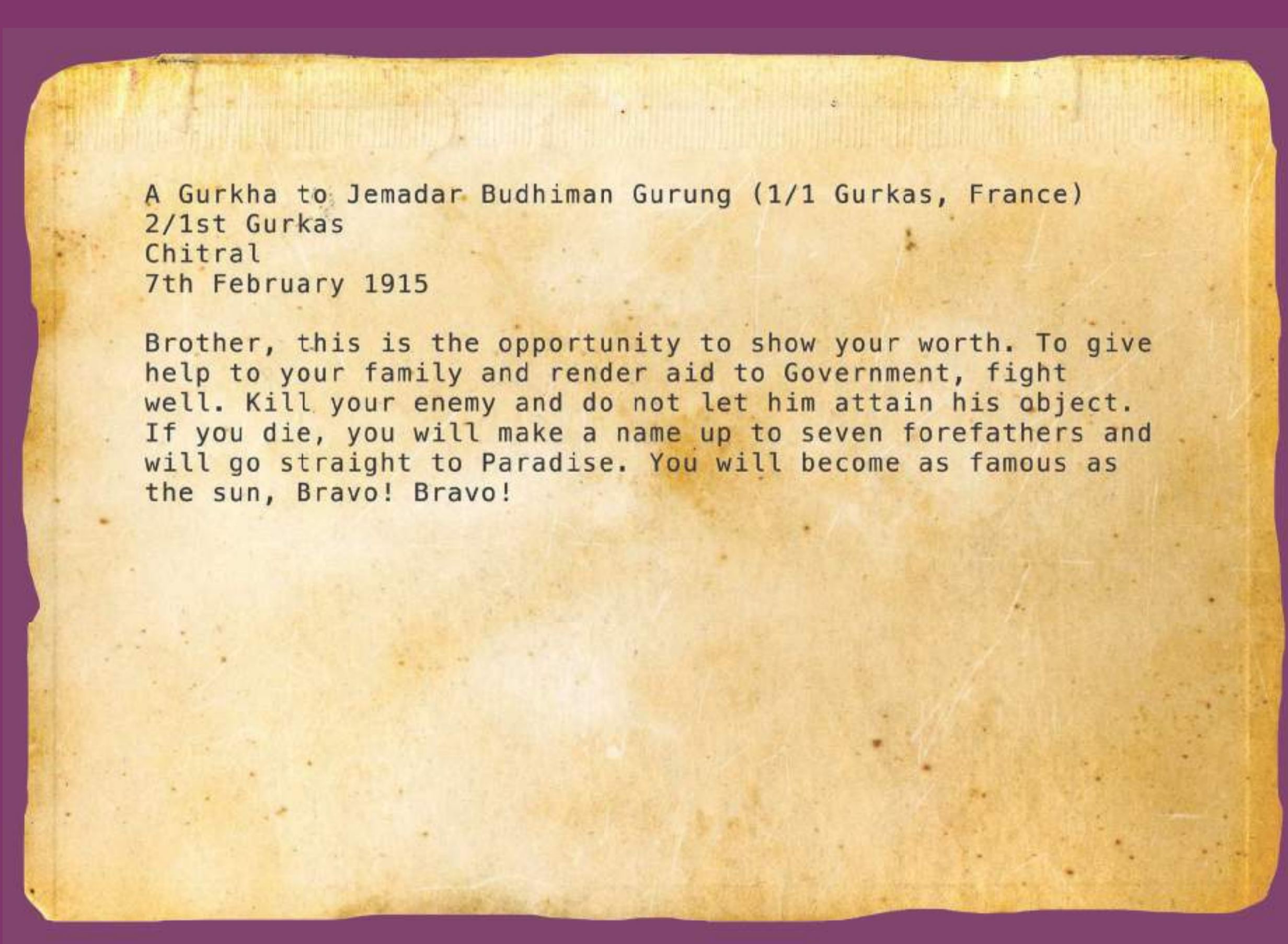
The Indian soldier was known to the British as the sepoy. The word comes from the Persian word for soldier. It was used to refer to all troops of Indian ethnic background, of any religion. Today it is still used as a title for a private soldier. To introduce a sense of uniformity all those who served in Indian army units were required to wear a turban, irrespective of religion - this included the British officers. However, many men displayed their diversity by arranging their turbans differently, which is why there is often no conformity in the images of the time. The custom of the turban remained until 1916 when those not required to wear them for religious reasons transferred to the Brodie Helmet, or 'tin hat' which provided better protection.



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INDIAN FORCES GO TO WAR

The British Empire of 1914 covered nearly a quarter of the world's population and stretched around the world, despite this the army was incredibly small – roughly 250,000 troops (excluding Indian Forces). The continental armies of Germany, France Austria, Hungary and Russia all numbered into the millions. The difference was that they were conscript armies and British forces of all countries were volunteers. The global nature of the Empire had meant that a far greater emphasis had been placed on the Royal Navy – which was the best and biggest in the world.



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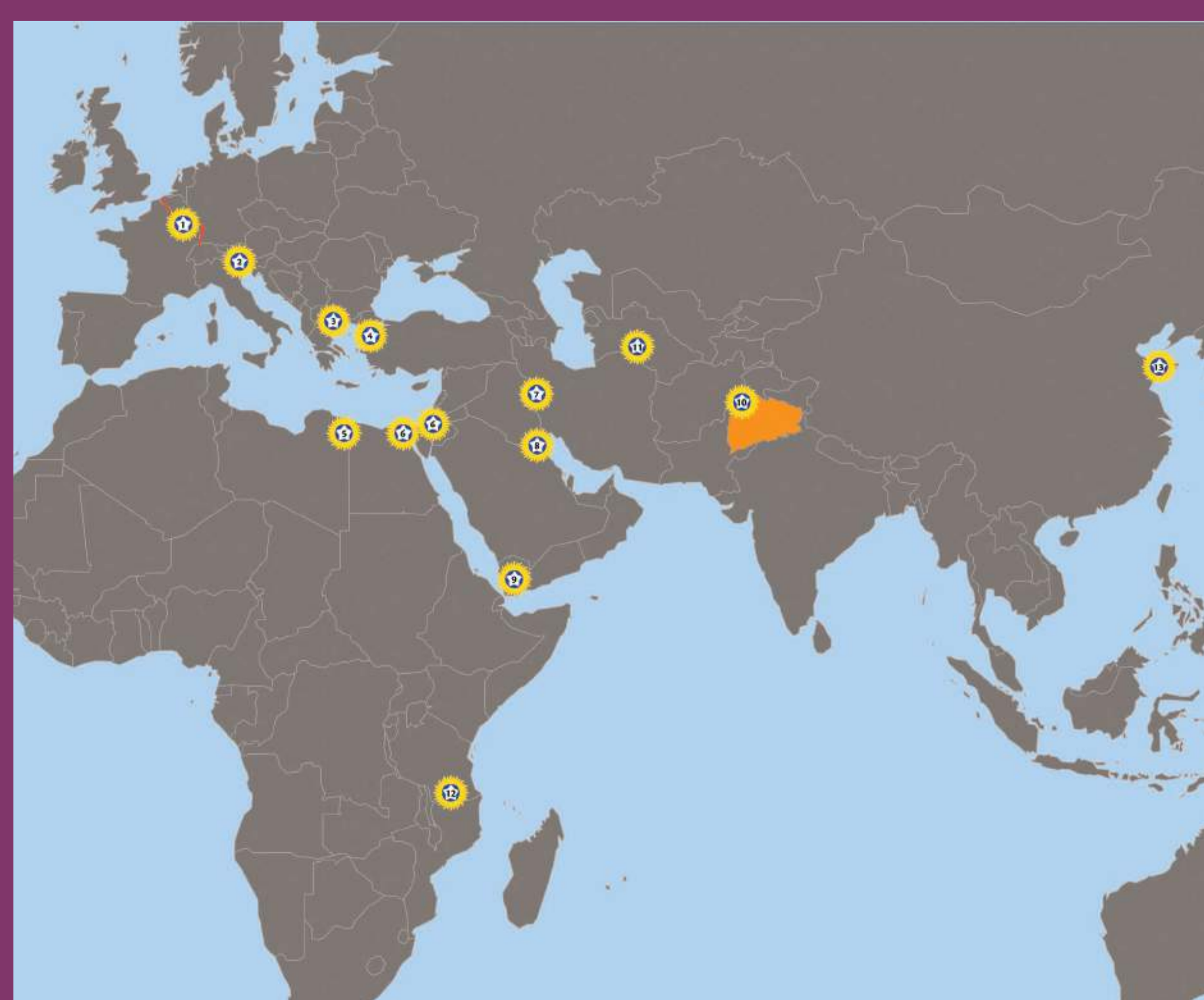


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The fighting of the First World War required a land force and the professional Indian troops were quickly despatched to the Western Front. Two infantry and two cavalry divisions arrived into France and Belgium by the end of 1914 and eventually 140,000 men saw service there.

In spring 1915

the majority of Indian troops were redirected to the Middle East where it was felt they would be better employed. Over the four years of the war the Indian Army grew from approximately 150,000 – 200,000 (combatants) in 1914 to nearly 1.4 million (combatants and non-combatants – support troops) by 1918. Over one million of the men would serve overseas.

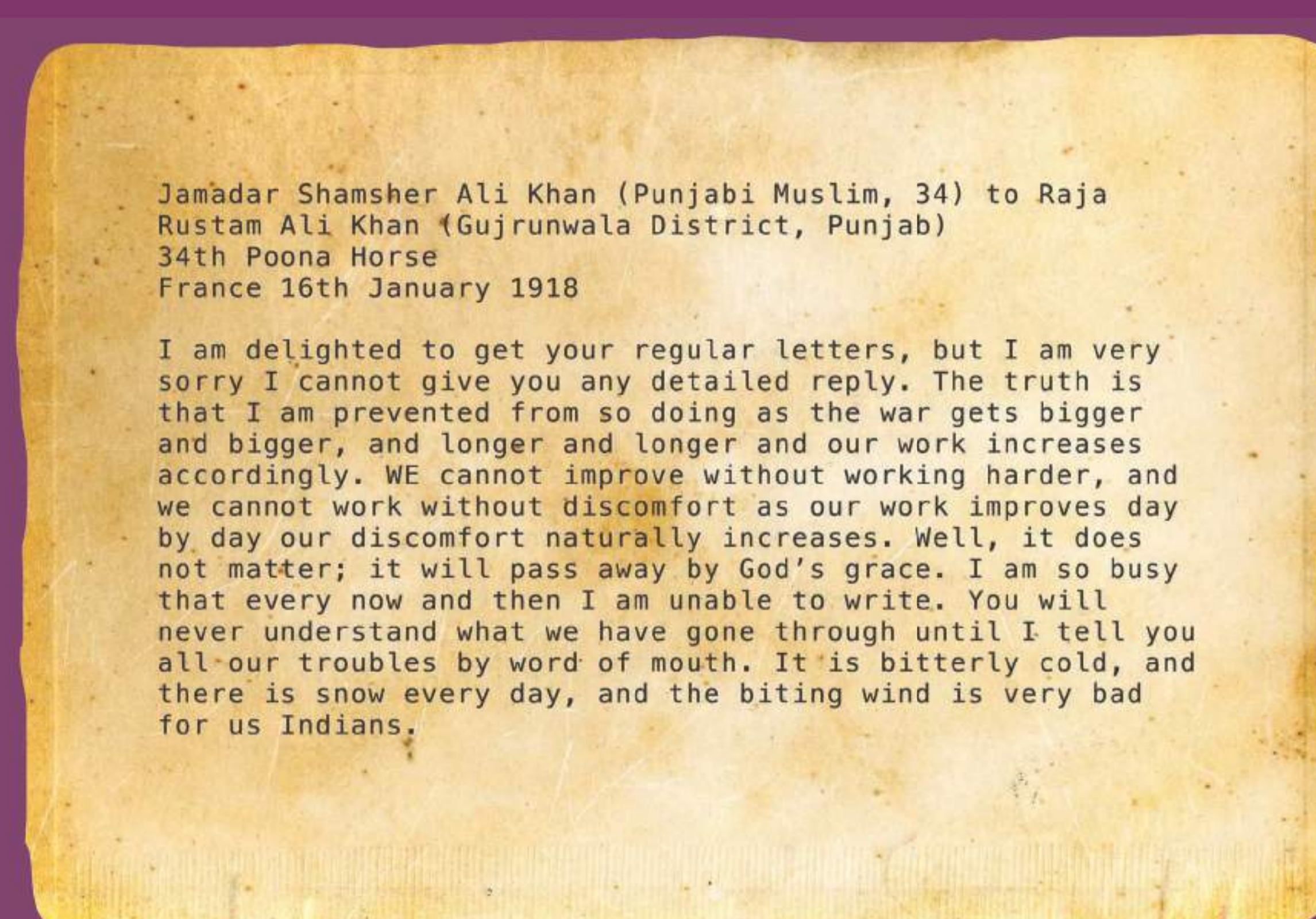


© Courtesy of UKPHA

1. Western Front (1914-18)
2. Italian Campaign (1917-18)
3. Macedonian Front (1915-18)
4. Gallipoli Campaign (1915-16)
5. North Africa Campaign (1915-16)
6. Sinai & Palestine Campaign (1915-18)
7. Persian Campaign (1914-18)
8. Mesopotamian Campaign (1914-20)
9. South Arabian Campaign (1914-19)
10. North-West Frontier Province (1914-18)
11. Russian Operations (1918-19)
12. East African Campaign (1914-18)
13. China Operations (1914)

HOW DO WE KNOW MEN AND WOMEN'S STORIES ?

During the First World War any letters sent from the Frontline to friends and loved ones had to pass through the censor. For the Indian soldiers that meant they were usually translated into English first. The original letters were sent on but the censors copies were kept and are now held by the British Library. They provide an incredible insight into the thoughts, feelings and ambitions of individual soldiers and their families.



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Of course not all the letters would be a true reflection of what the men were experiencing as they knew their letters would be read by other people. However, overall they present a personal account of what was happening and of their everyday concerns for loved ones as well as tales of life on a battlefield.



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In the correspondence the men and their families talk about the reality and brutality of war, their fears and hopes for the future and about being an Indian soldier in a foreign land. Some are surprised at how well they were treated while others report the prejudices that they encountered from the British and from other Indian troops.



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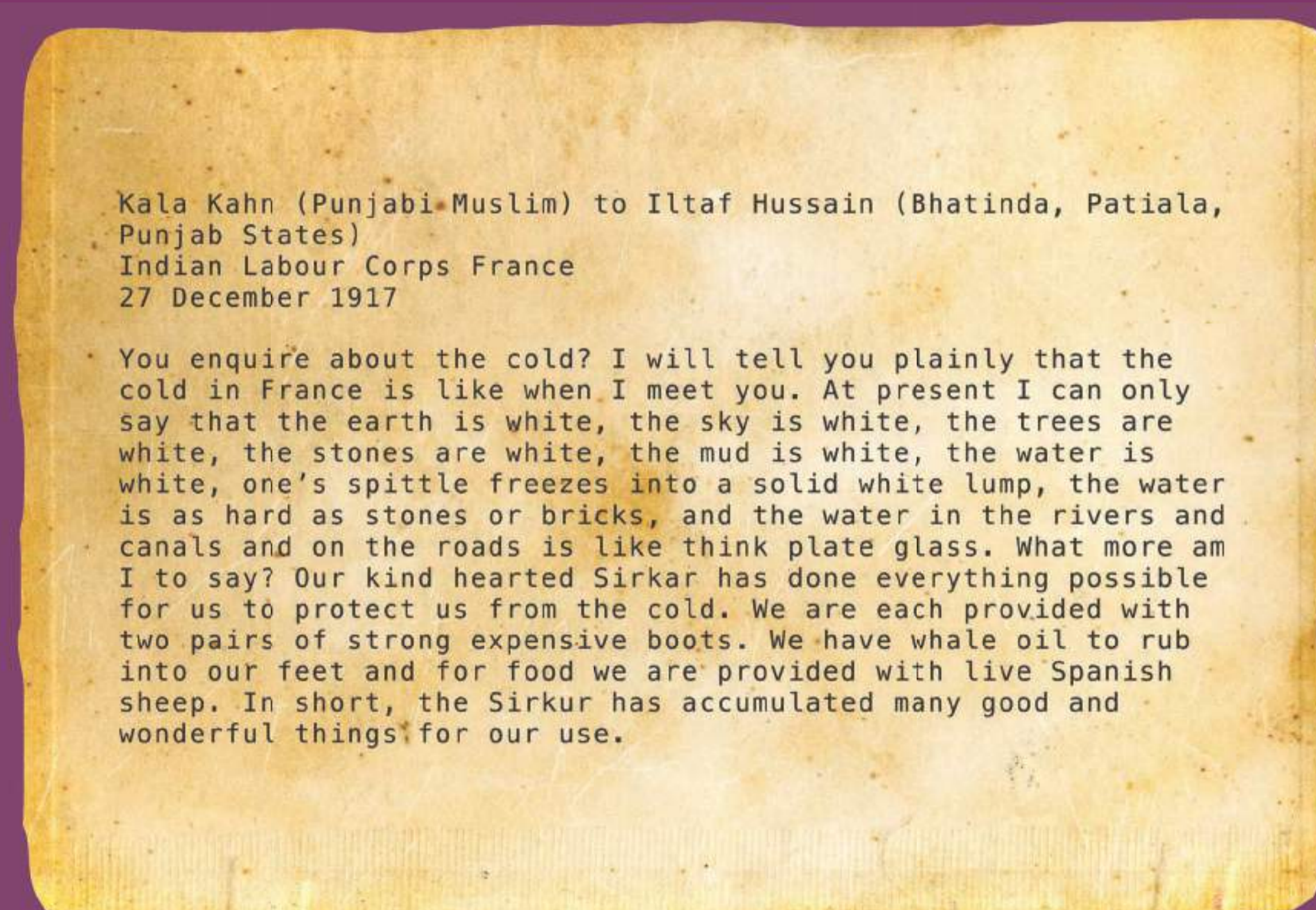
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LETTERS SENT HOME

The letters that were sent home tell many stories and reflect the different perspectives that all soldiers feel arriving into a warzone. Initially in 1914 the Indian soldiers had a particularly hard time, as many had been despatched in their summer kit which was not much help against the fierce winds and rain of Flanders and northern France. An appeal was immediately established and additional clothing was collected across Britain and France and taken to the Indian soldiers. While some of the soldiers were used to the harsh conditions of the Indian mountains and weather others would never adjust to the depressing cold and the 'lack of sun' for months on end.



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A number of the soldiers wrote home about rain in another way – they cannot believe a place is so green. One wrote from France in 1916 *'Here is very cold at present. It snows much. The little discomfort that we experience is due to cold and rain. Otherwise the country is like heaven'*. This attitude is due to the large amounts of fertile land that he had seen. A number compare the land that is farmed to their own difficult farming conditions back home.



© We Were There Too

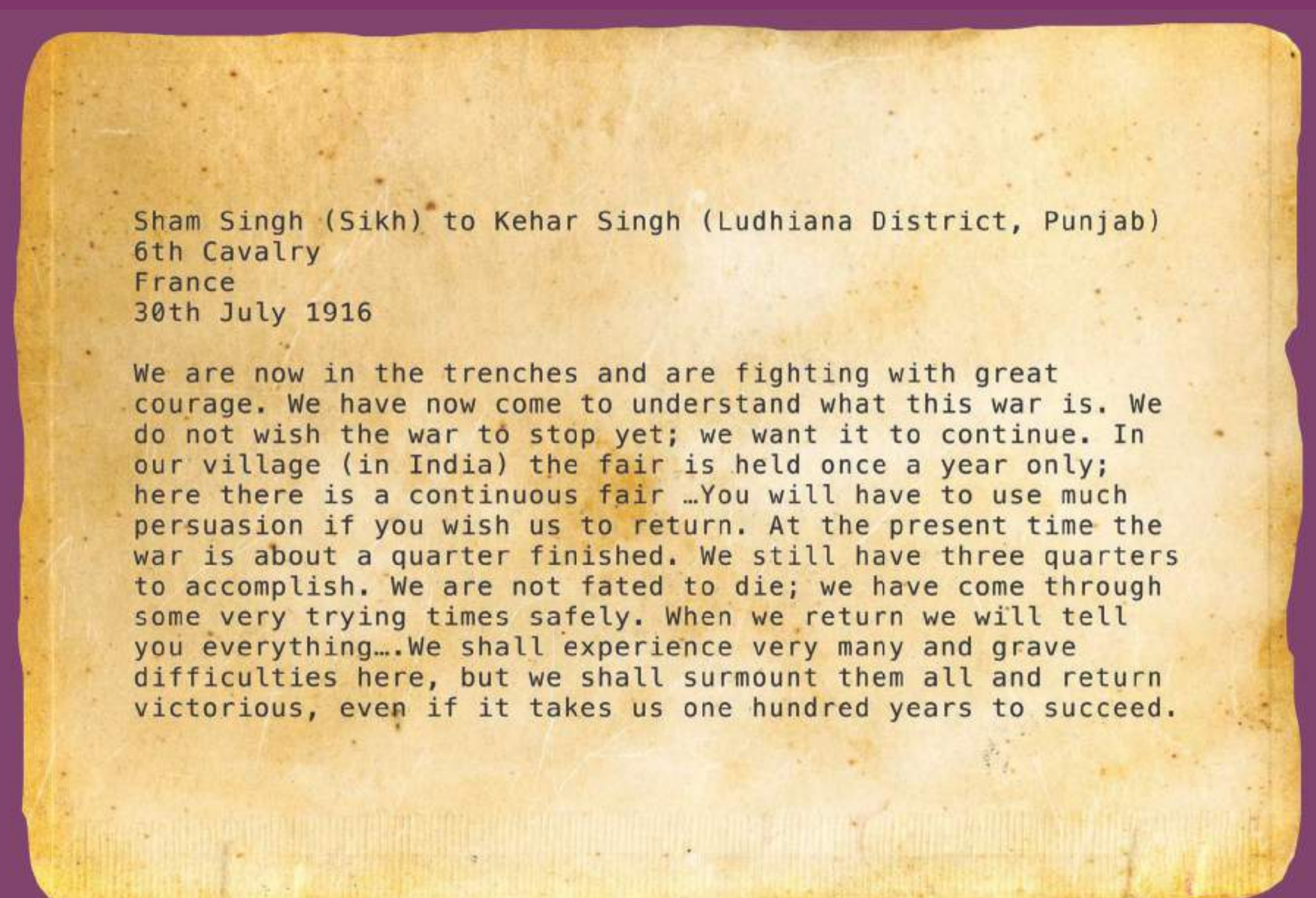
Quite a number also mention that they are treated better by the British in France and England than they are in India. They write to their families that they have received good supplies of food for religious festivals and when they are injured. Despite this a number still write about the longing they have to return home especially as the war started to drag on.

CONFLICT

THE REALITY OF SERVING IN WAR

The reality of the war and the type of fighting was a shock to most soldiers of the First World War. Even professional troops were not used to days and days of artillery fire and constant fighting. Some of the soldiers wrote about how terrible it was and they were keen to return home others got used to the job of being a soldier.

“The conditions of the war is like leaves falling off a tree, and no empty space remains on the ground. So it is here; the earth is full of dead men and not a vacant spot if left.”



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Another writes in 1915 to a relative: *“For God’s sake don’t come, don’t come, don’t come to this war in Europe. Write and tell me if your regiment or any part of it comes.... and tell my brother Muhammad Yacob Khan for God’s sake not to enlist.”* Others write encouraging their relatives to enlist as *‘Once you are enlisted – eat well and dress well.’*

Others in France talk about their acceptance of fighting for God and the King even in 1917: *“We are serving the Sirkar well, we have no anxiety about the war.”*

“I am very happy here, and am doing my master’s work continuously with heart and soul just as my ancestors have done.”



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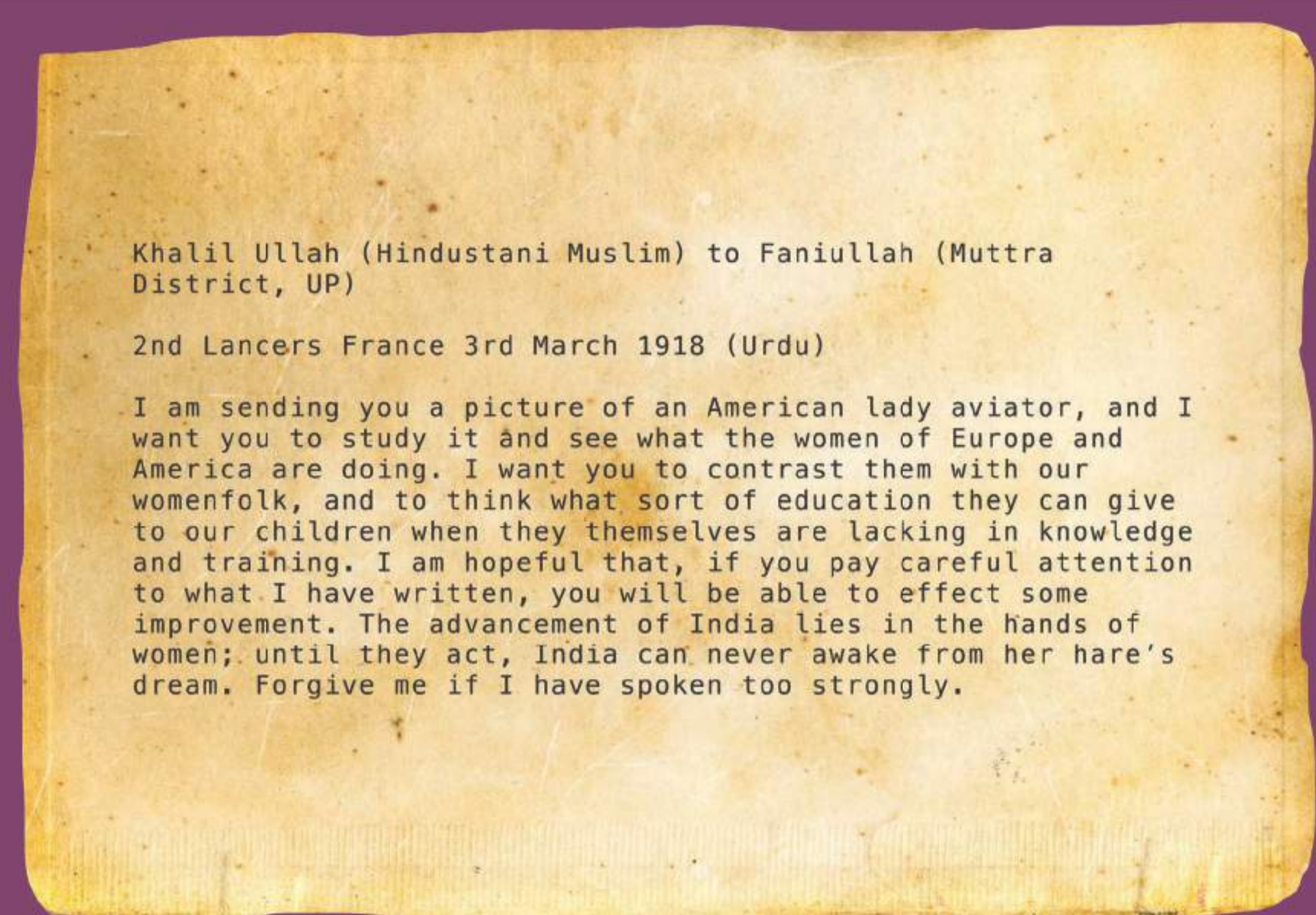
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WESTERN EDUCATION AND WOMEN

A number of the letters include the differences between their own country and those of Western Europe, some are particularly interested in the way women are treated. Some write home about how women are educated and that this is something that should be adopted in India. They are also interested in how attitudes to marriage and work could be taken from Europe to improve Indian life.



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"I have seen in this country that no person is uneducated. Even the women are educated, and there is no women who is uneducated.

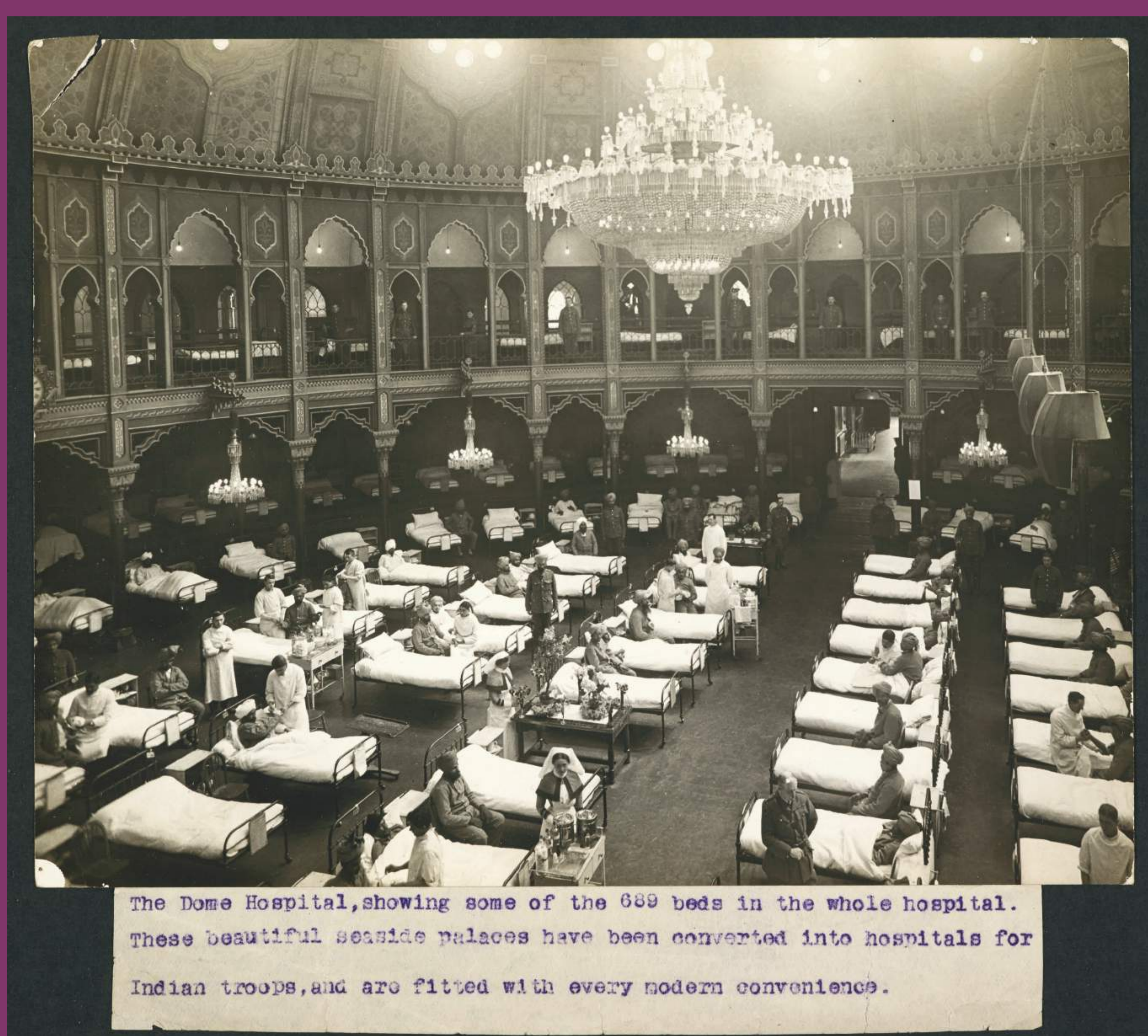
All the inmates of the house are educated... Men and women both work so hard and cheerfully that we regard them with wonderment. Women even drive a plough. What more am I to say? You must certainly send Nadir Khan to school."

There are also letters about marriage and how it is not arranged by families and only when a man is old enough to work. These cultural differences are treated as an opportunity to learn from different customs.

"As regards marriage, there is affection first between the two parties, who are never less than eighteen years of age... No man has the authority here to beat his wife. Such an injustice occurs in India only."



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INDIAN NURSE

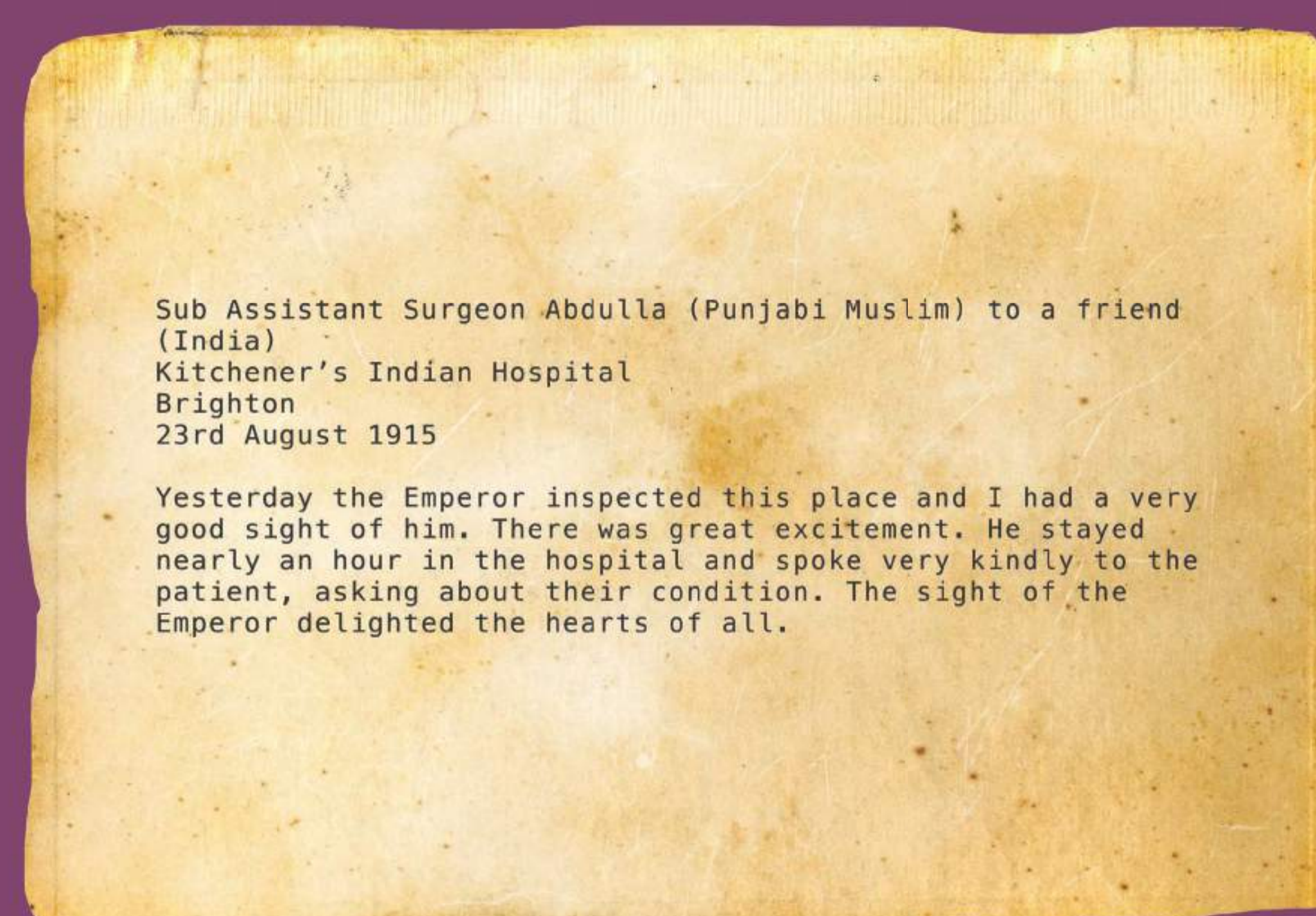
SOPHIA DULEEP SINGH

Princess Sophia Duleep Singh's father was the last Maharaja of the Sikh Empire in India. Duleep Singh's family had handed their lands over to the British and Sophia was born in the UK. Financially the family suffered without its lands and ended up in debt. Sophia's Godmother, Queen Victoria, provided her with support and a home at Hampton Court.

Sophia studied Chemistry at University and with her sister became a socialite, but a trip to India made her politically active. In 1909 she joined the Women's Social Political Union and became an active suffragette. She famously sold the Suffragette newspaper outside Hampton Court Palace where she lived, provoking the King to discuss whether she should be evicted from her home. Her suffragette activities included acts of physical and violent protests, such as destroying property. She gave her possessions away so that she could refuse to pay her taxes (a popular suffragette protest) and have nothing seized to pay the bill. She was arrested several times for her activities but never sent to prison, due to her status and royal connections.



Peter Bance © www.duleepsingh.com



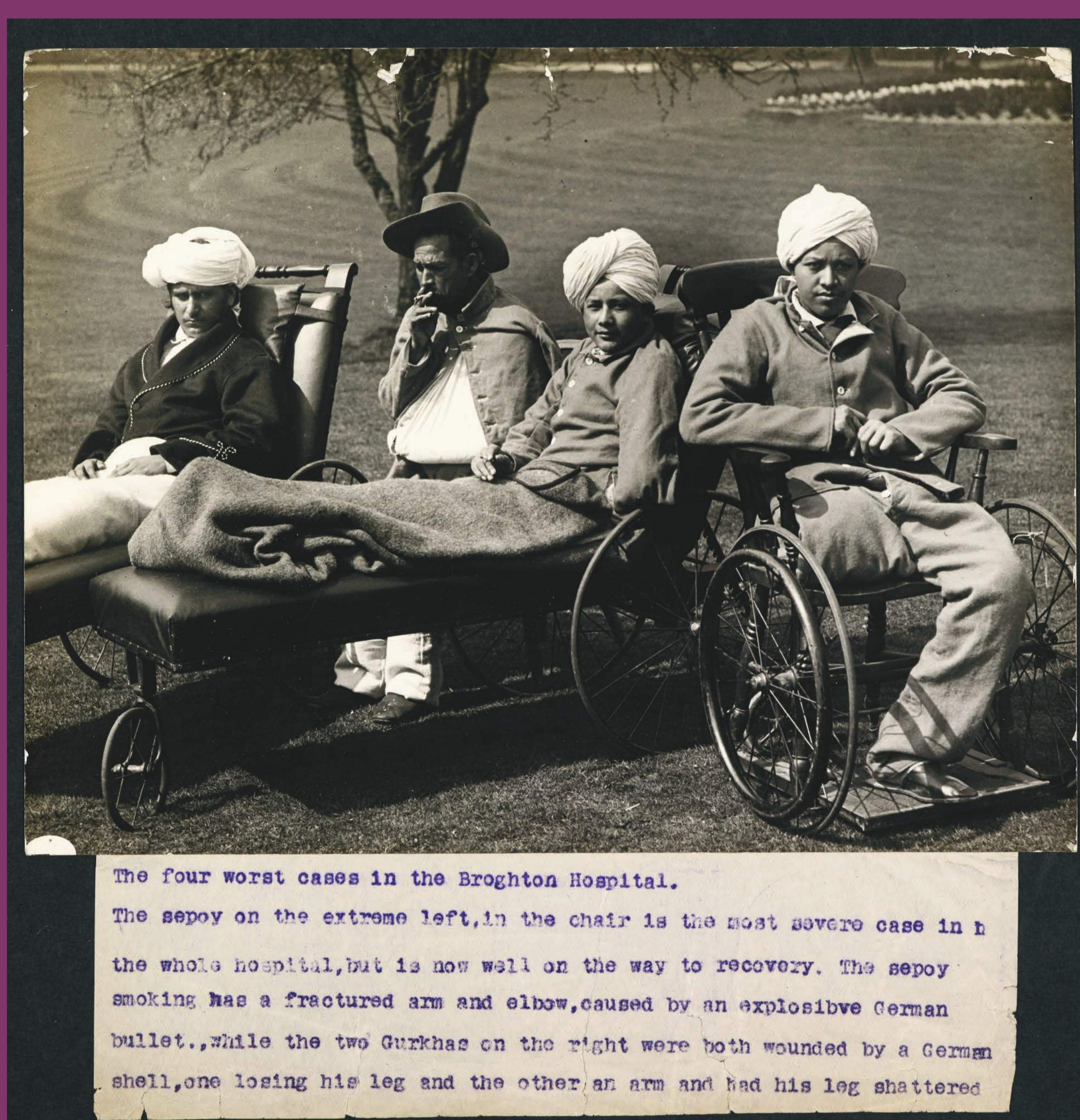
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PRINCESS SOPHIA DUNLEEP SINGH (standing 3rd from left), as a nurse during WW1, c.1915 SDS02. FDS Collection, OS, 2012

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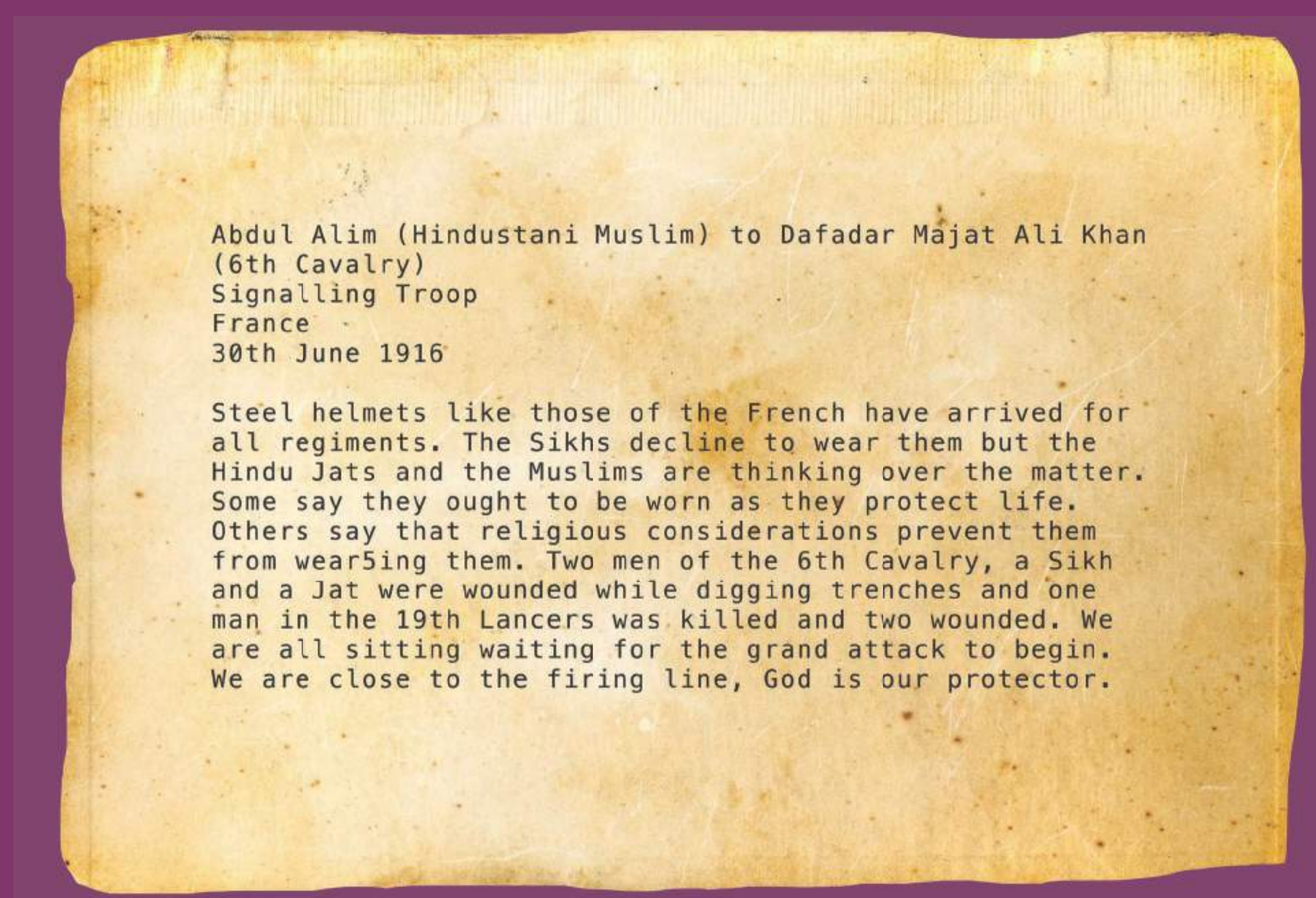
At the start of the war she supported campaigns for the Indian soldiers and the Lascars on the British Fleets and she attended protests against the prohibition of creating a female force. Alongside other suffragettes she decided to give up her campaigning to support the war effort and in 1915 she became a Red Cross nurse, including tending to the Indian troops at the hospital in Brighton. The Sikh soldiers were shocked 'that the granddaughter of Ranjit Singh sat by their bedsides'. After the war she continued her campaigning for women's rights and Indian equality.



© Royal Pavilion Museums, Brighton and Hove

DIVERSITY OF THOSE WHO SERVED

The British Indian forces were drawn from across South Asia from the countries that today we know as: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. Although there were initially a high number of recruits from the Punjab region the forces would increasingly diversify and would include many different ethnic and religious groups including: Punjabi, Muslims, Sikhs, Garwhalis, Pathans, Jats, Rajputs, Dogras, Gurkhas, Mahars, Bengalis, Kachins and Anglo-Indians.



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These groups had their own forms of religious observance which the British authorities were keen to support and that was the role of many of the non-combatant Indian troops that were recruited. Sometimes the different groups clashed with each other, but more often than not these men fought, worked and served together in a way that they may not have done back home.



Peter Bance © www.duleepsingh.com

At the hospital in Brighton Pavilion for injured Indian forces separate water supplies were installed for Muslims and Hindus and there were nine kitchens so that food could be cooked by the patients' co-religionists and fellow caste members. For spiritual needs the Sikhs were provided with a tented Gurdwara in the grounds of the Pavilion, and Muslims were given space on the eastern lawns to pray towards Mecca.



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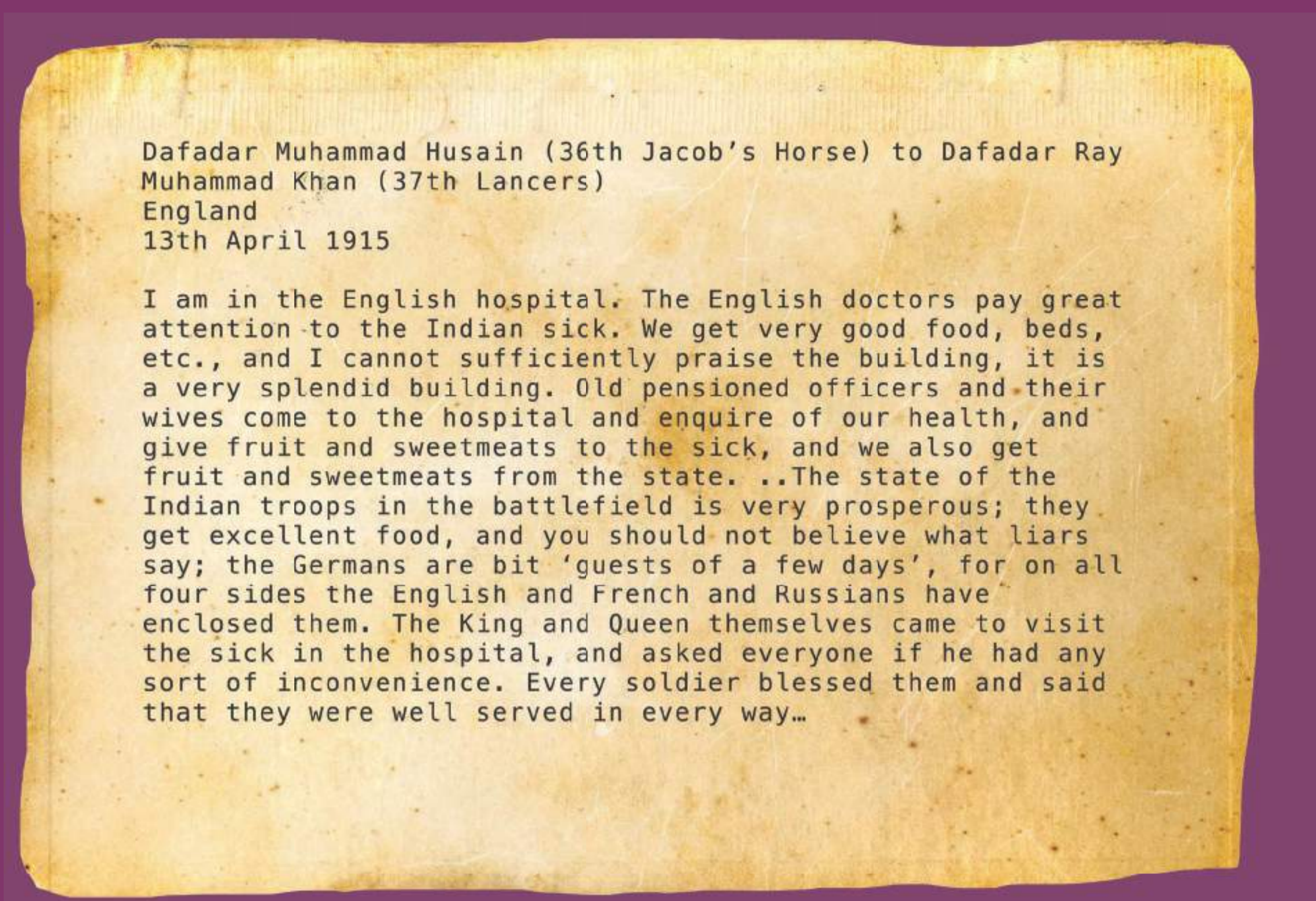
On the battlefield the men of the different faiths and ethnic groups who served together were all buried with respect and without any clear divisions. In death all the burials were considered equal.

INJURY TREATMENT AND HOPES

The medical system for injured troops meant that those with long term injuries would be transferred back to the UK for treatment so that the hospitals in Belgium and France could deal with the daily casualties of the fighting. Due to the special needs of the Indian Forces it was felt that those soldiers needed to be kept together where ever possible.

In Brighton three hospitals for Indian servicemen were created. The most impressive was at Brighton Pavilion which converted the grand rooms into wards, operating theatres with state of the art X-Ray machines, kitchens and relaxation areas. From December 1915 to the end of 1915 over 2,300 men would be treated there.

Muslim soldiers that unfortunately died of their wounds in Brighton were buried under the auspices of the mosque in Woking. Outside of Brighton on the South Downs the authorities built a ghat for the 53 Hindu and Sikhs who died to be cremated. After the war a Chattri was established on the site as a permanent war memorial to the Indian Forces. Approximately 75,000 Indian soldiers died during the war and a similar number were wounded.



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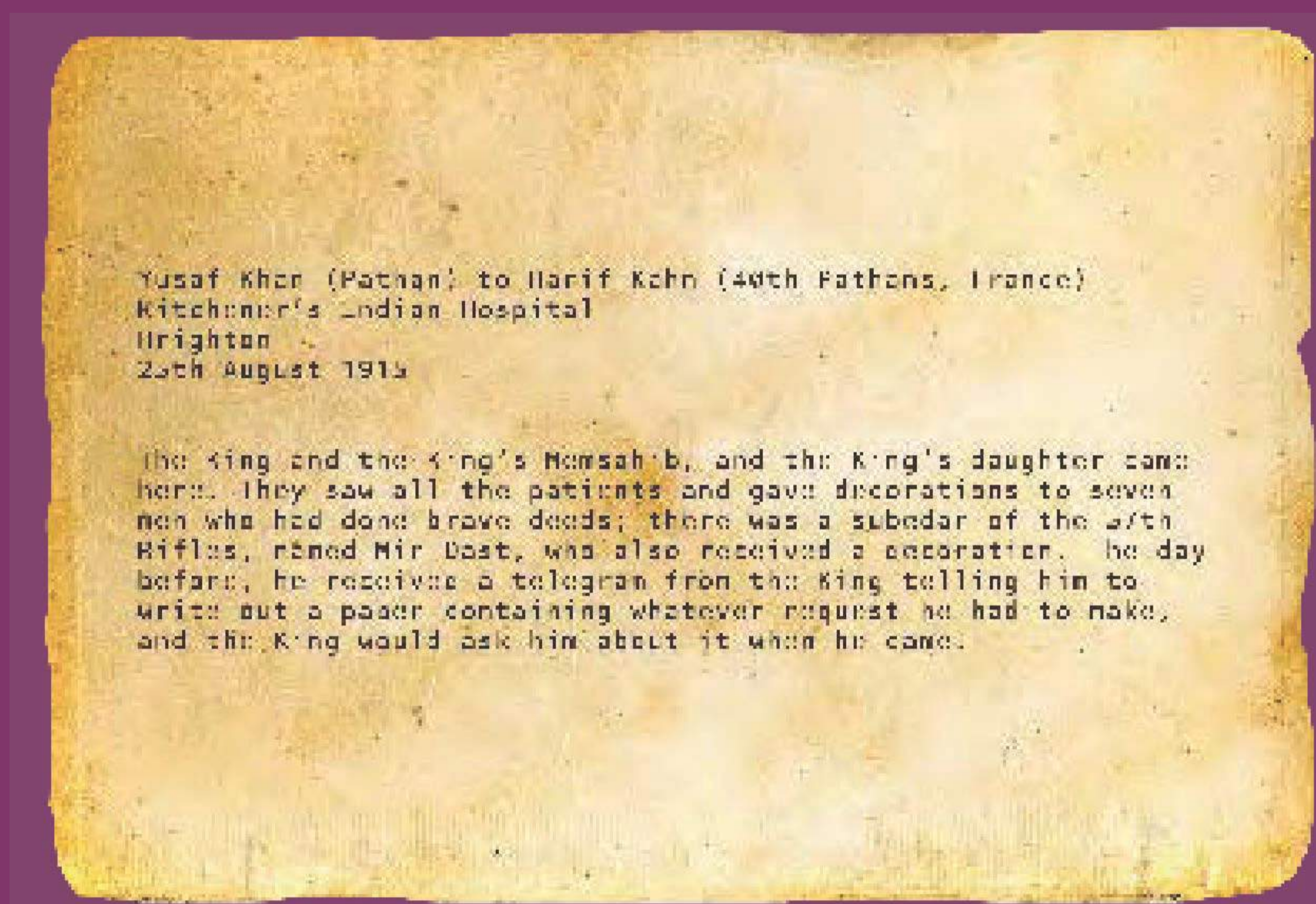
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MEMORIALS TO REMEMBER SERVICE

There are graves of Indian service men across the Western Front, sometimes contravening religious practice. This was not out of disrespect but due to the need to bury the dead quickly. 100 years later those graves are a permanent reminder of the diversity of those that fought.

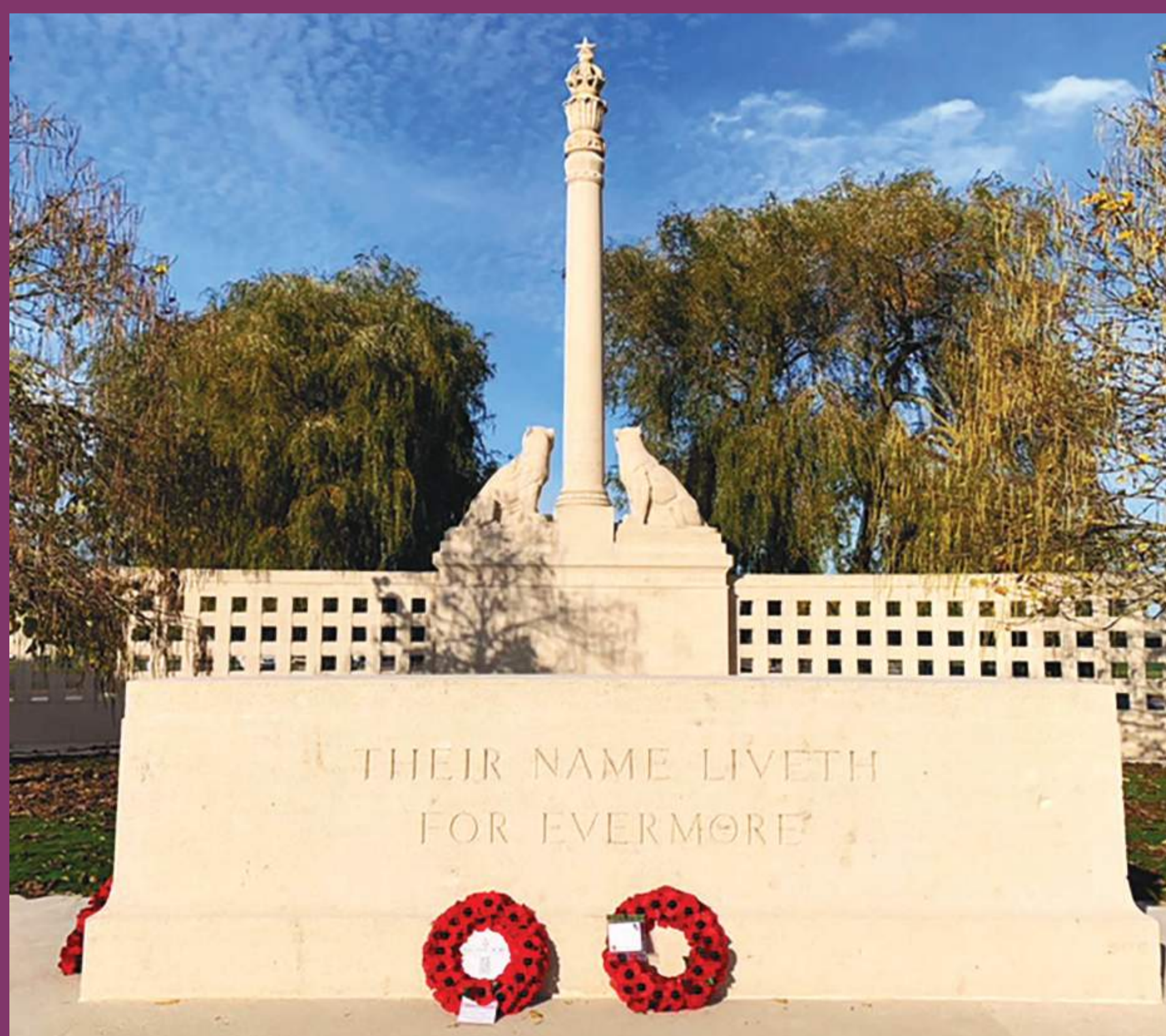


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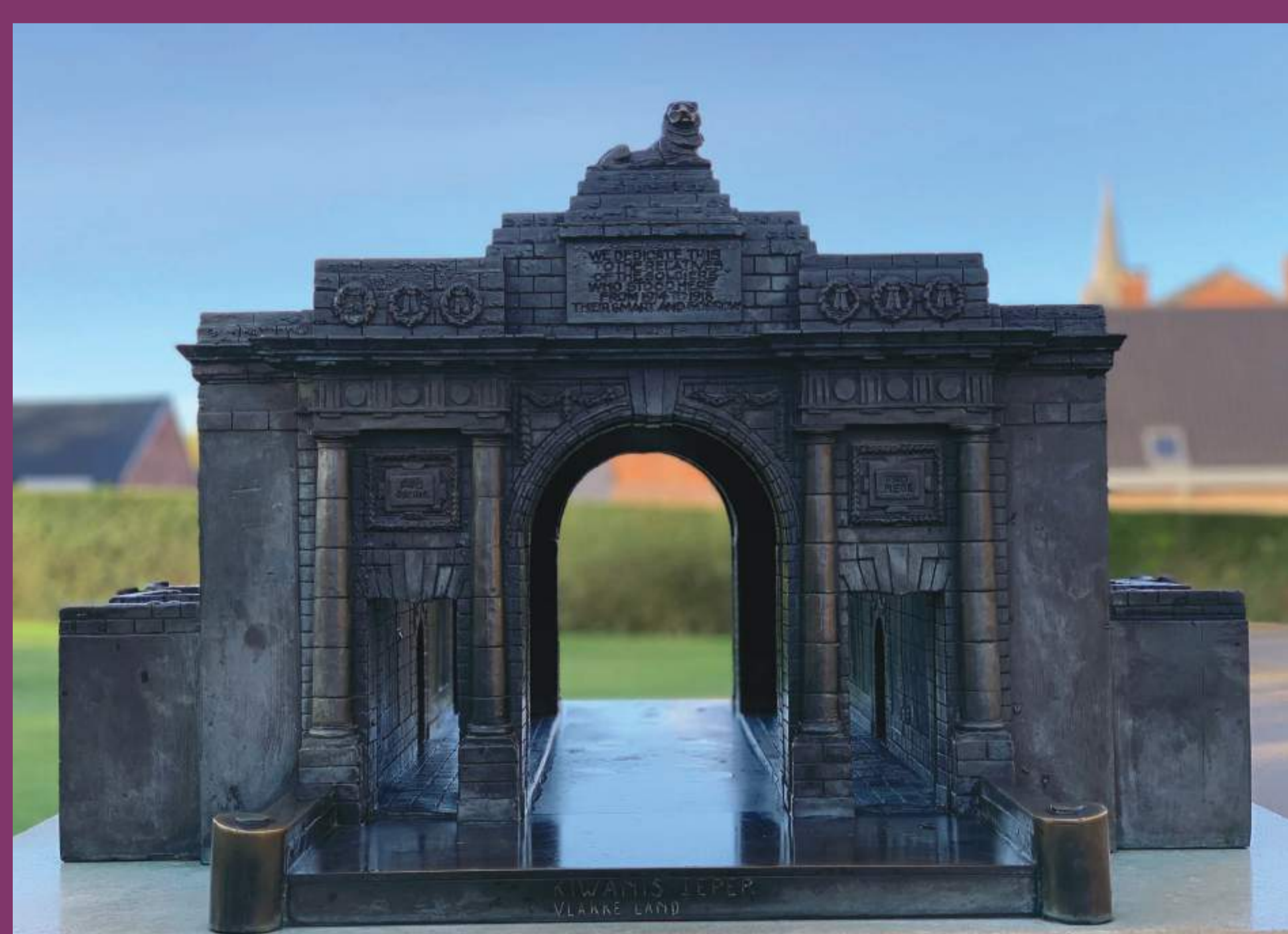
© Courtesy of We Were There Too

In India the India Gate Memorial was built as war memorial to the Indian Forces of the First World War, located at the eastern end of the Rajpath in Delhi. It now serves as a national memorial to all Indian service personnel.



© Courtesy of We Were There Too

The Neuve Chapelle Memorial was built where Indian forces fought a battle in March 1915. It honours their contribution across the Western Front and commemorates approximately 4,700 Indian soldiers and labourers who died in France and have no known grave.

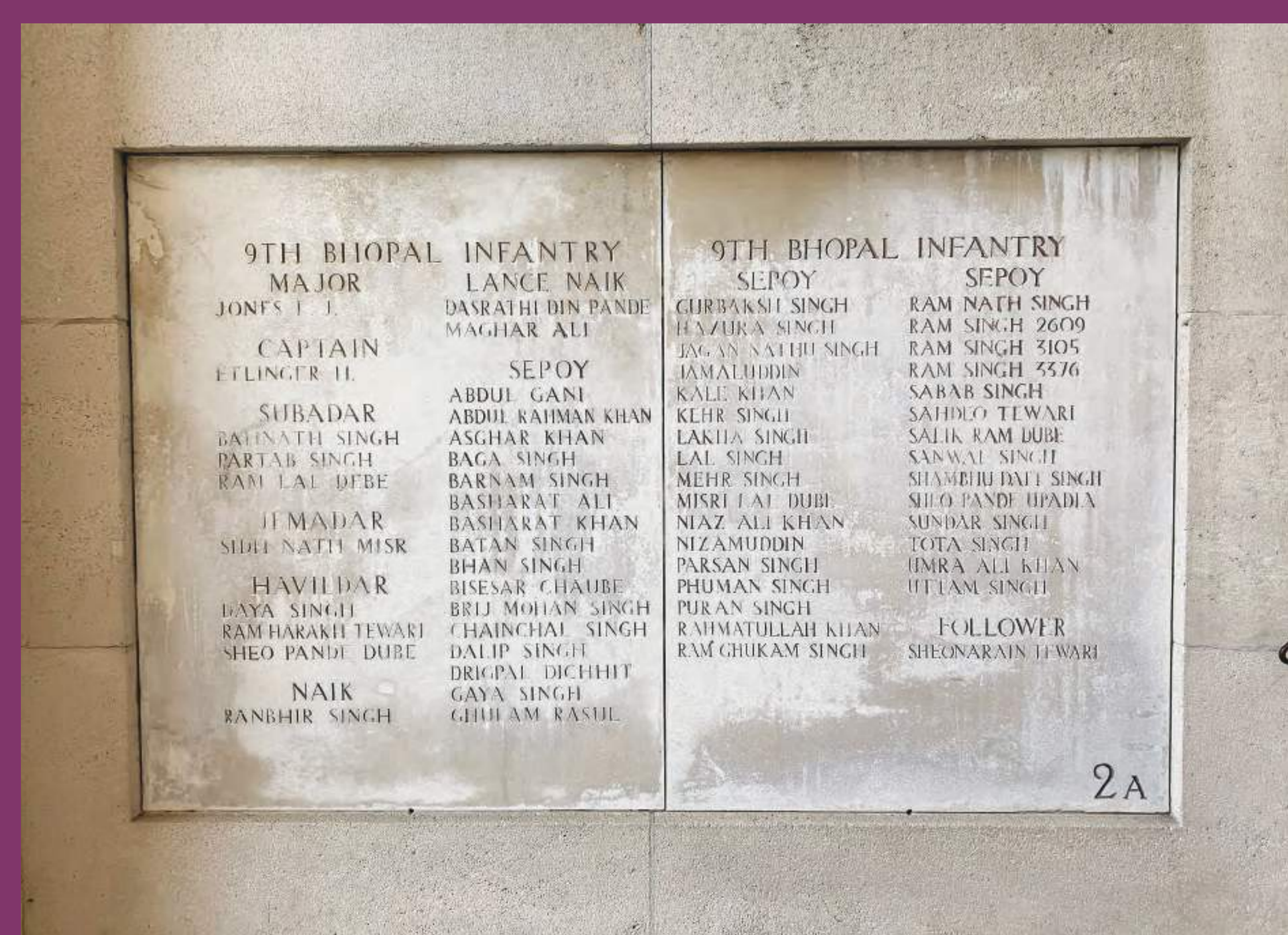


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In Ypres, Belgium the Menin Gate includes more than 400 names of men from the Indian forces who died in Flanders with no known grave. There is also a memorial next to the Menin Gate specifically for Indian Forces. In London the Memorial Gates remembers the men and women of India from two World Wars, elsewhere you can spot small memorials where the role of Indian servicemen is included around the UK.



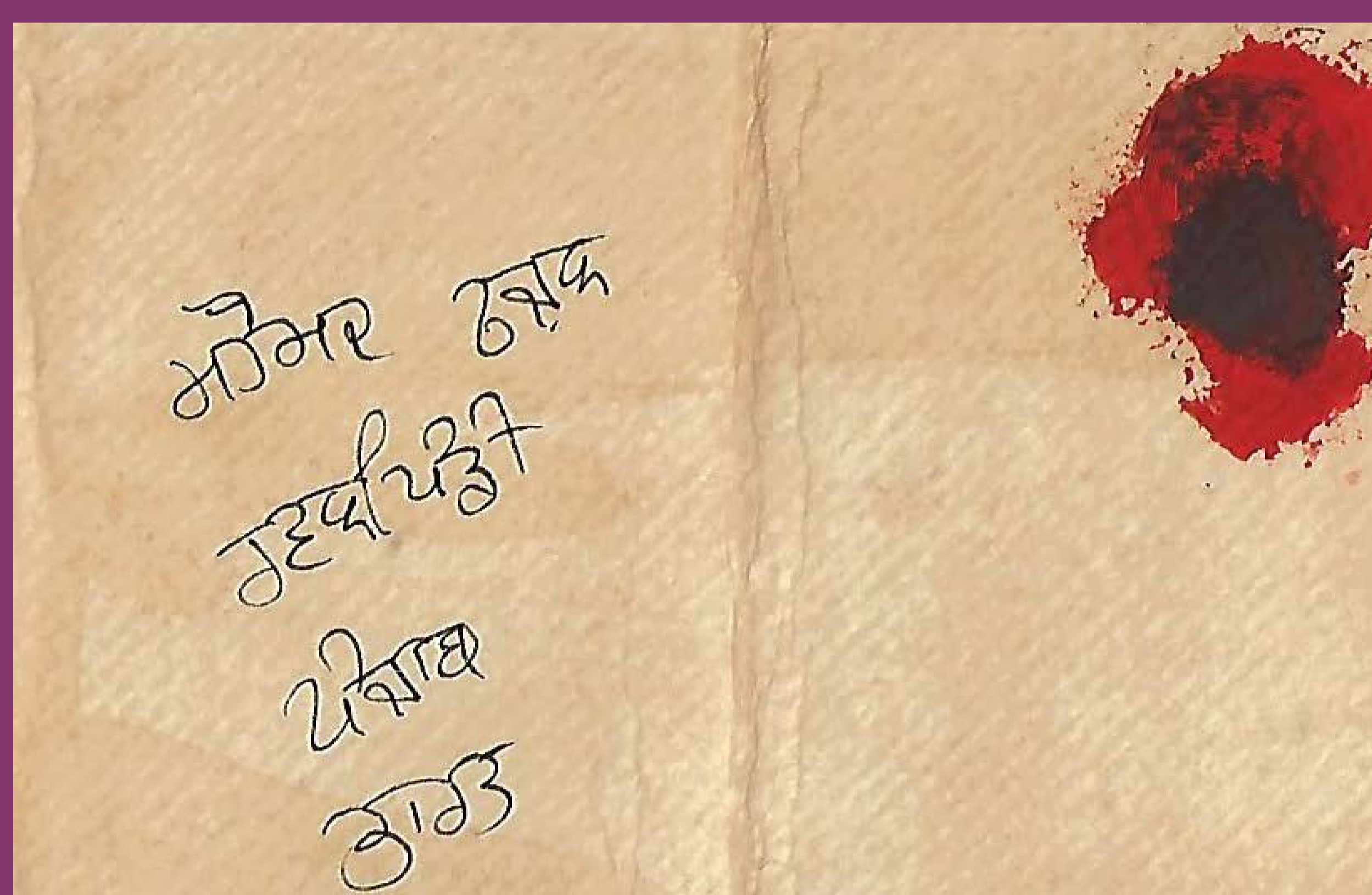
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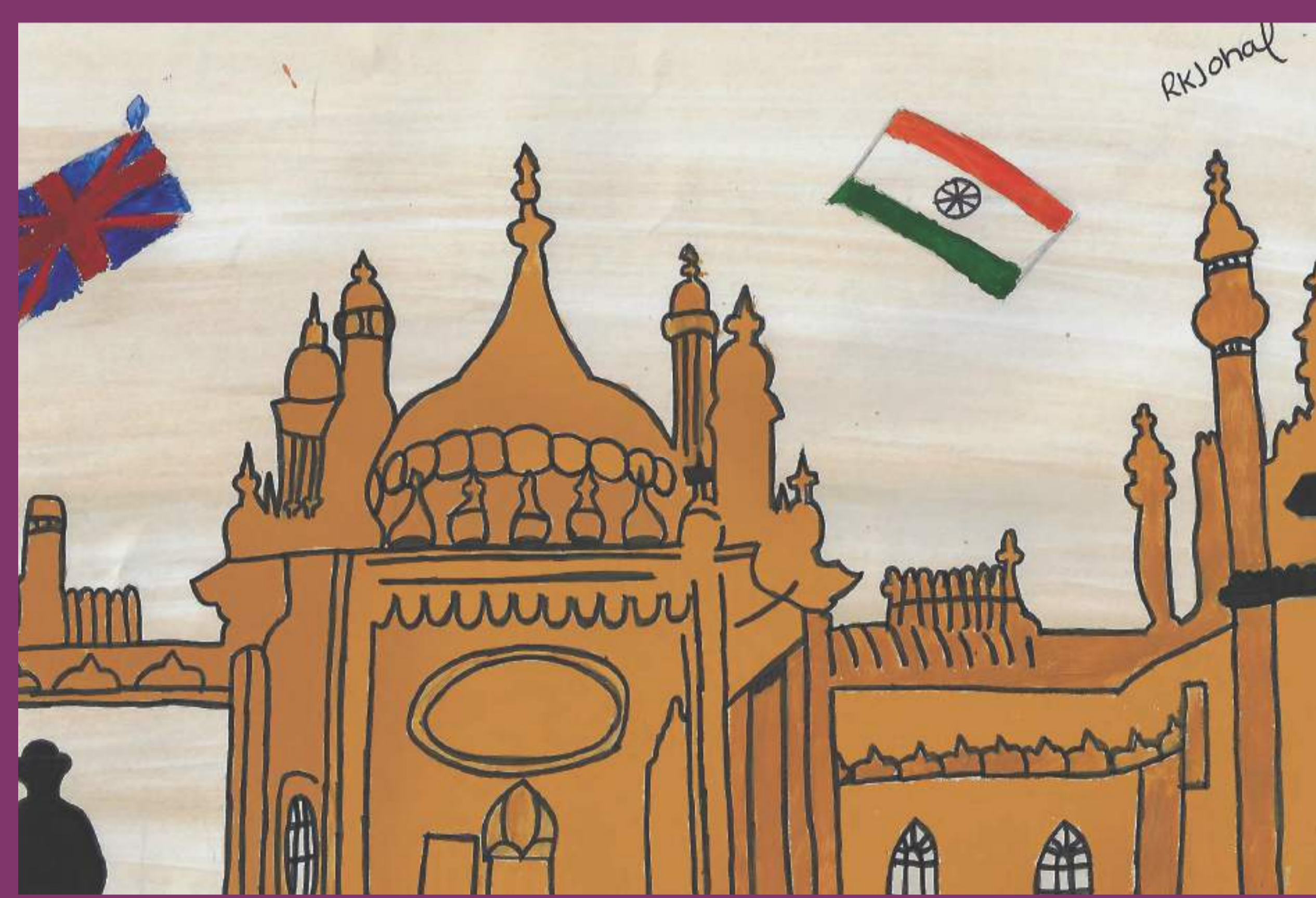
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CREATIVE RESPONSES

In this project 'Journey From Home', the story of the Indian involvement has been directed using the letters and images of the period. We have chosen to explore themes that have arisen from that time and to explore some of those themes through the journeys of young people today as they find out about the history of the British Indian involvement in one of the most important events of the modern era.

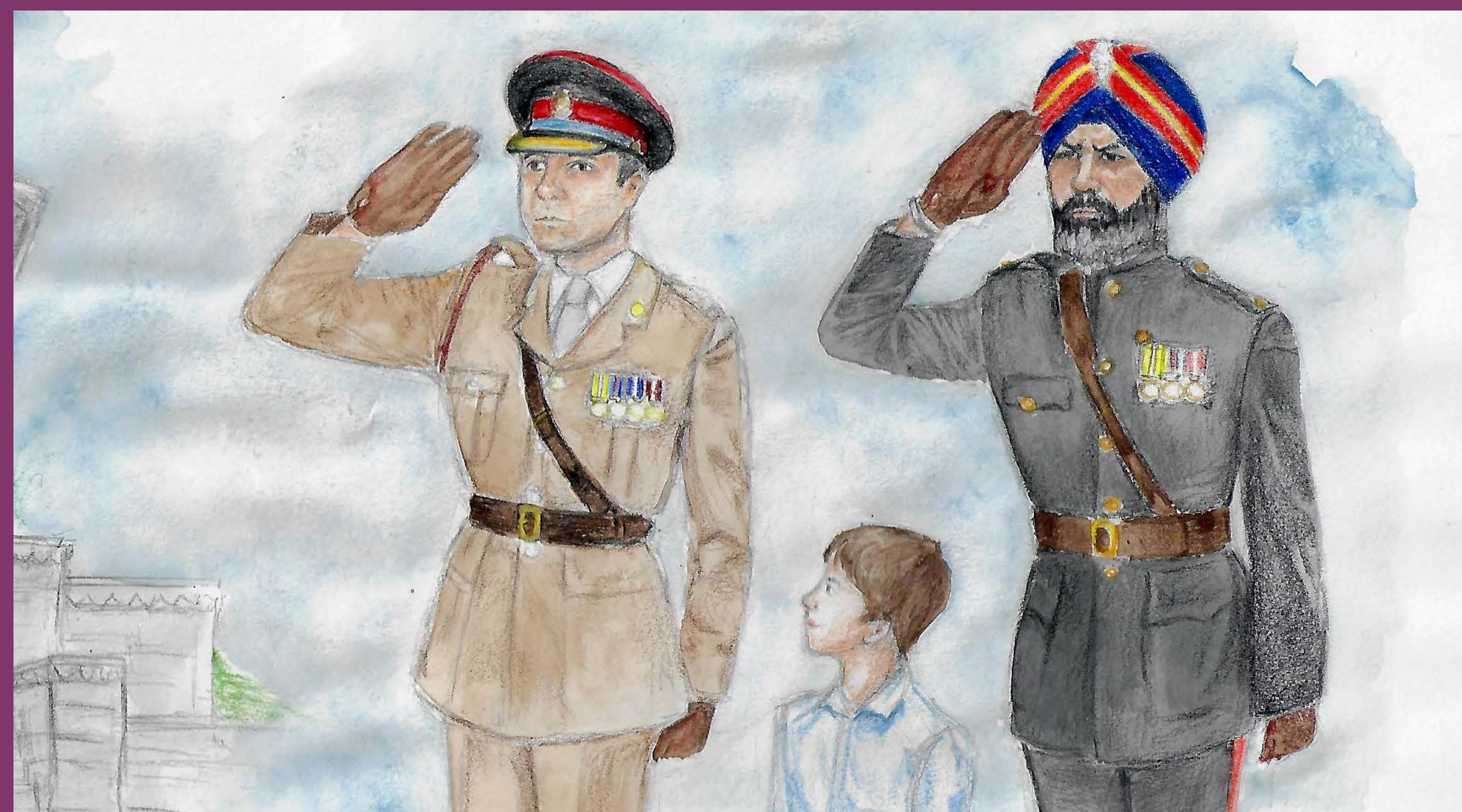


Courtesy of Baljodh & Simrandeep - Holly Lodge School



Courtesy of R K Johal - Holly Lodge School

The young people on this project have been on a journey of investigation and remembrance. They have visited important sites in the UK and on the Western Front such as: The Woking Peace Garden, created for the memory of Muslim troops; the Chattri outside Brighton; the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing in Ypres with the panels of Indian names; and Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemeteries where Muslim, Sikh and Hindu soldiers are buried.



Courtesy of Tania - Holly Lodge School



Courtesy of Amarah - Holly Lodge School

Through creative art workshops and the writing of their own letters, they have become part of the Journey From Home and produced an emotional and reflective response to the themes of war, Remembrance, women and identity. We are proud to share these journeys with you.