



The Caribbean's Great War Education Pack



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By
The West India Committee





1917

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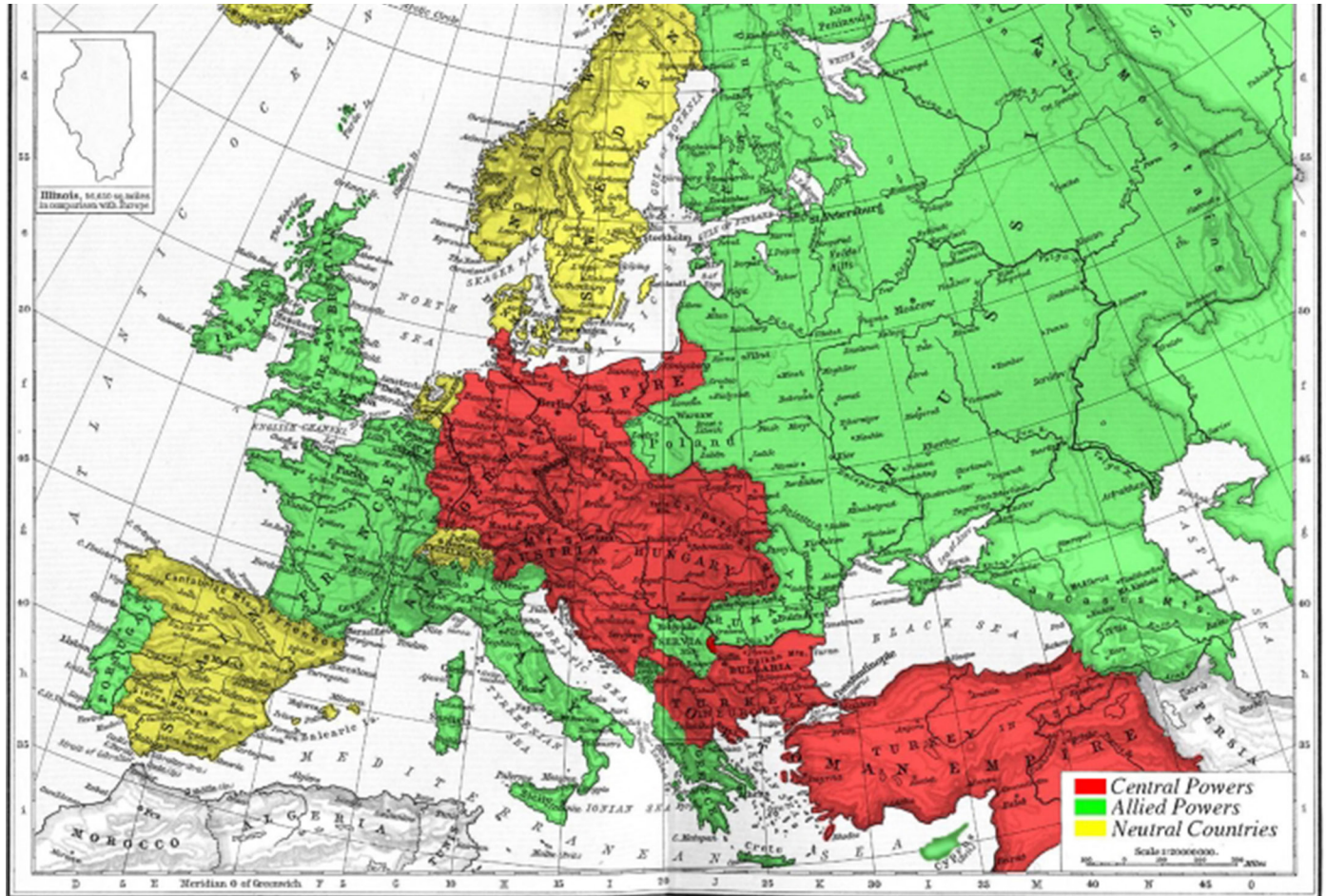
THE WEST INDIAN CONTINGENT BADGE

Europe in 1914	1
The British Empire in 1914	2
The Caribbean in 1914	3
Timeline of the First World War	5
Timeline of the British West Indies	7
Charity and the home front	9
How the islands were governed	11
Ambulances in the First World War	12
The War	14
The Ottoman Empire	17
The B.W.I.R. Regimental Badge	19
The B.W.I.R. and the machine gun	21
Aeroplanes and the First World War	23
The Regimental Drum	24
First World War Recruitment Posters.....	25
The West Indian Contingent Committee .	27

The WEST INDIA COMMITTEE
London.

Europe in 1914

On 4th August 1914 Britain declared war on Germany who had waged war against its allies France and Russia. Also, by violating Belgium's neutrality Germany had drawn Britain into another European conflict. The map below shows you the alliance system in Europe in 1914:



Britain was allied with France and Russia from 1907.

The German Empire had allied itself with the Empire of Austria-Hungary in 1879 and the Turkish Ottoman Empire joined them in August of 1914.

A busy shopping street in London in 1914

The British Empire in 1914



The British Empire during the First World War

In the 300 years preceding the First World War, Britain conquered many places across the globe and settled areas previously unexplored by European people. Over that time Britain formed complex relationships with her colonies which each had a different relationship with Britain. Britain's impact on the world was vast, and the many cultures that formed part of her Empire also changed the character of the British nation. At the outbreak of the war the Caribbean was one of the more loyal areas of the Empire due to the long history between Britain and the region that commenced in the early 1600's.



Caribbean children dressed in costumes from around the Empire

The Caribbean in 1914

When Britain declared war on Germany, Britain's colonies questioned whether they should get involved, too. The first year of the conflict saw a lot of casualties in the British Army, and while initially the High Command were opposed to the idea of using non-white troops, they eventually allowed the formation of the British West Indies Regiment.



A traditional Caribbean costume in 1914

Before the establishment of the British West Indies Regiment in 1915, the Caribbean was making its contribution to the war effort in the form of charitable donations and fundraising. However, beneath the surface the British Government was being encouraged to allow West Indians to fight on the frontline.



A group of young men and police officers pose for a photograph by a dock

Because the West Indies had been colonised by Britain for over three centuries, and because Britain was the first European power to abolish the Slave Trade, Caribbean people felt a strong sense of loyalty to the United Kingdom. This explains why Caribbean people were so willing and enthusiastic by 1914 to fight for ‘**their** King and **Mother** Country’ after centuries of slavery. This booklet explains how the Caribbean helped Britain and her Allies during the war and what the British West Indies Regiment did during the conflict.



A busy road in Belize

Timeline of the First World War



Archduke Franz Ferdinand

Serbian nationalists assassinate Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire

The Ottoman Empire enters the war in an alliance with Germany

June

October

1914

August

Germany declares war on Russia and France. Britain declares war on Germany

Britain's Caribbean colonies begin to send aid and West Indians begin attempts to enlist in the British Army.

The troopship *SS Verdala* gets caught in a Canadian snow storm en route to England carrying over 1000 ill-equipped West Indian troops, many require amputations as a result frostbite.

The Russian Revolution begins



Jamaica's Daily Gleaner reporting on the Verdala incident

The B.W.I.R set sail for Alexandria

March

March

1916

1917

June

The Egyptian Expeditionary Force is formed by Commander Allenby to combat the Ottomans

The Imperial Camel Corps, who fought in Egypt



The Battle of Messines

This timeline is a guide to the events of the First World War, with events relating to the British West Indies Regiment highlighted in red.



King George V

Following an intervention by King George V, Britain approved the formation of a West Indian contingent

The British West Indies Regiment is established

May

October

December

1915

Italy declares war on the Austro-Hungarian Empire

Sir Douglas Haig replaces Sir John French as the Commander in Chief of the British Expeditionary Force



No-man's land of Passchendaele

The Battle of Megiddo is won and the Ottoman Empire is defeated

The First World War ends in a victory for the Allied Forces

September

October

July

1918

December

The Battle of Passchendaele begins

A victory parade in London



Several BWIR battalions mutiny in response to racism and slow demobilisation experienced at the Taranto camp in Italy

Timeline of the British West Indies

1492 Christopher Columbus becomes the first European to discover the Caribbean

1500's Spain embarks on the conquest of the Americas reaching as far as California

1612 Britain colonises Bermuda

1623 Britain colonises St Kitts

1627 British colony founded on Barbados, grows to 20,000 settlers in 20 years

1500 English privateer Sir Francis Drake wages a lengthy assault on Spanish ships and ports

1590's

1600's As the Spanish Empire declines, Britain, France and the Netherlands seize territories held by Spain in the Caribbean

Soldiers of the West India Regiment



1807
The end of the Slave Trade in the British Empire

1873-1874
The West India Regiment serves in the Ashanti Wars on the Gold Coast of Africa

1914
Outbreak of the First World War. Britain declares war on Germany. The Caribbean colonies follow suit and send men and supplies

1800

1834
The Abolition of slavery across the British Empire, including all of Britain's Caribbean colonies

1802
West India Quay constructed in London



The West India Docks

1900

1915-1921
The British West Indies Regiment sends 16,000 volunteer to serve on the Western Front, in the Middle East and Africa

1700-1750

1655

Britain captures Jamaica from Spain

Age of sugar, tobacco and rice in the Caribbean

1735

The West India Committee founded in London

1750's

Turks and Caicos conquered

1761

Britain captures Dominica from France

1795

The West India Regiment is established as part of the British Army

1650-1730

The Golden Age of Piracy in the Caribbean

1700



British and French forces battle over St Vincent and the Grenadines

The infamous Captain Blackbeard

1762-1783

1783 The French re-capture Dominica

1789 The French Revolution



The French Revolution

1939

The outbreak of the Second World War, Britain calls on the colonies one last time, 10,000 join the Caribbean Regiment, the RAF and other British regiments

1962

Dissolution of the Federation of the West Indies, Jamaica and Trinidad declare independence from Britain

1969

Anguillan Revolution to remain British

1958



A West Indian RAF recruit in the Second World War

The Federation of the West Indies is established, and includes Jamaica and Trinidad

1966

Barbados declares independence from Britain

The coat of arms of the Federation of the West Indies



2000

British Overseas Territories Act remodels relationship of remaining colonies with Britain

2002

Charity & the home front

Island contributions

In the years preceding 1914 the West Indies suffered from a series of natural disasters while some islands struggled economically. Annual catastrophes such as hurricanes, droughts and earthquakes continued throughout the First World War. Despite this, the region donated millions of pounds in cash and tens of millions of pounds worth of goods.

Donations included supplies of:

- Rum
- Sugar
- Oil
- Cotton

And machinery, such as:

- 9 aeroplanes
- 11 ambulances



Donations of rum at Paddington Station

Fundraising was very effective on the Caribbean islands and greatly helped the early war effort. The beneficiaries included the Prince of Wales' National Relief Fund, the Red Cross Society, Belgian Relief and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem.



* In 1915's money, £1,000 would be worth the same as £ 103,050.99 in 2015's money.

Raw materials were vital for feeding troops and for fuelling new machinery that was reliant on fossil fuels.

Different islands had different strengths, but all maintained donations of vital resources throughout the conflict.

In November 1914 **Guyana** sent 500,000 pounds of rice to Britain, this amount was worth £20,000 at the time.

In October 1914 the Legislative Council of **Jamaica** agreed to gift £50,000 worth of sugar to Britain. Fruit was also sent from Jamaica throughout the war.

St. Vincent donated £1,000 worth of arrowroot for wounded servicemen.

*Bananas were exotic and rare
in Europe in 1914*



Dominica spent £4,000 to purchase an aeroplane for the Royal Flying Corps.

Montserrat donated £250 worth of guava jelly to wounded troops.

In 1914 the Legislative Council of **Grenada** voted to buy £6,000 worth of cocoa for troops.

St. Lucia donated £21,495 in total and gifted £2,000 worth of cocoa.



At Christmas the West India Committee sent each soldier a tin of chocolates

Trinidad was oil rich and provided the Royal Navy with millions of gallons during the war. Trinidad's Legislative Council voted to spend £40,820 on cocoa to send to England. An emergency war tax and other funds including the "Patriotic fund" were set up at the beginning of the war and raised over £10,000. Trinidad was the largest charitable contributor in the region, giving in total £480,000 – it was an island with an annual revenue of over £970,000 in 1914.

FACT FILE

How the islands were governed



The City Council of Port of Spain in Trinidad - 1939

The Caribbean islands were each governed by a representative of the King and Government, **the Governor**, who reported directly to the Secretary of State for the Colonies back in Britain.

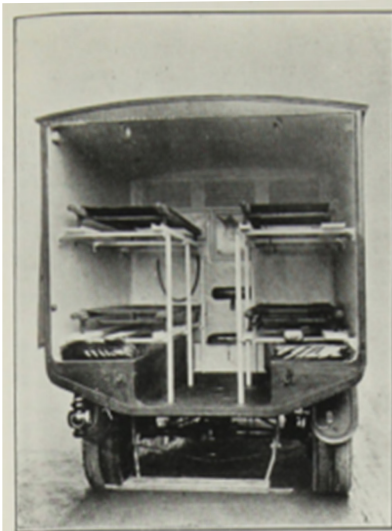
The ruling styles differed between the islands and so did their economies, concentrating on agricultural production as they had many plantations that grew a variety of crops. Larger islands enjoyed more freedoms than smaller islands, being more valuable to Britain in terms of what they could produce.

Legislative Councils were permanent committees chosen to deal with state problems and look after the needs of the local people.

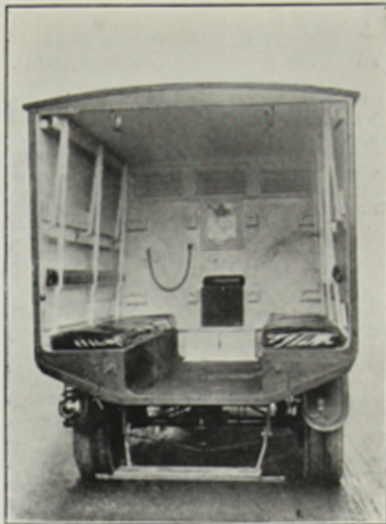


The Council of Dominica - 1951-1954

Ambulances in the First World War

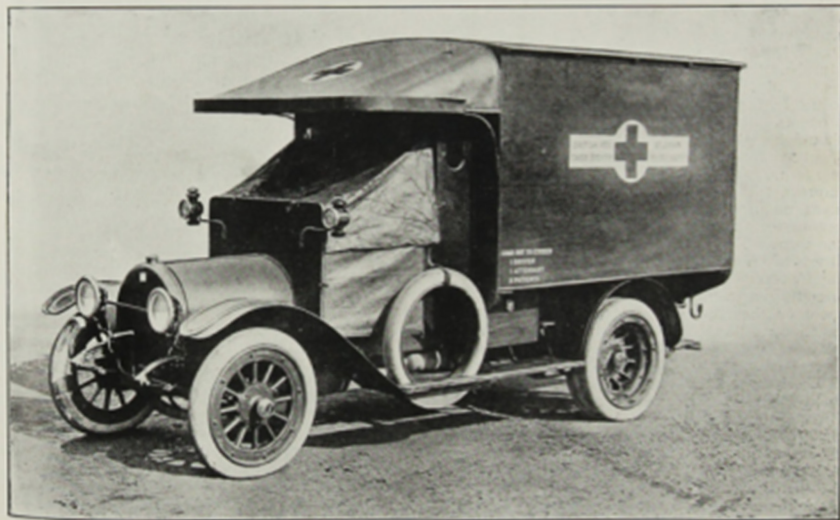


THE STRETCHERS FIXED IN POSITION.



PREPARED FOR EIGHT SITTING CASES.

Many islands raised funds to purchase ambulances that were then sent to Britain for the war effort.



Photographs from the 1914 West India Committee Circular showing some vehicles sent from Barbados and Trinidad.



DID YOU KNOW?

Mahogany was also sent from the Caribbean and was used to make propellers for aeroplanes. The Admiralty and the War Office bought almost the whole of British Honduras' mahogany output for 1916 and 1917 to build aeroplane propellers.

Mahogany from Belize was also used to make items such as "last rites" crosses, like this one seen here, that were often carried by Christian soldiers



The British West Indies Regiment included men of all faiths. The Caribbean was a racial and cultural 'melting-pot' with many religions brought to the islands from around the world.

ACTIVITY

Draw the symbols of as many religions as you know:

The War

These pages explain what the **British West Indies Regiment** did during the war.

16,000 men from the British West Indies fought in Egypt, Palestine, East Africa and Mesopotamia (Iraq) while also supporting the front line on the Western Front in non-combat roles. Over 1,000 other West Indians joined other regiments in the British Army.



Soldiers of the B.W.I.R. marching through London

It was partly because of King George V that the West Indies had its own regiment. He believed that all men should be given the chance to fight, regardless of race, class or religion.

Because of an overwhelming sense of patriotism in the Caribbean and the opportunities that military service could offer, all of the men of the British West Indies Regiment were volunteers.



Non-Commissioned Officers of the B.W.I.R. in Egypt in 1916

Initially, the British Government could not agree on the conditions of service for West Indians wishing to participate in the conflict. While eventually allowing the formation of a West Indian contingent, many battalions served primarily in roles that did not involve fighting. These were the labour battalions responsible for digging trenches, latrines, moving ammunition and generally supporting troops on the frontline. While they were not in direct combat, their work was hard as they were still exposed to enemy bullets and shellfire. They served on the Western Front in Europe, and also supported the attacks on Germany's African colonies of Togoland (today Ghana and Togo), Tanganyika (today Tanzania), and Kamerun (today Cameroon).



An officer on horseback

The troops of the British West Indies Regiment were treated poorly in comparison to others, and as a result some battalions mutinied in 1918 once the war had ended. However, the Regiment was properly supported and respected in Palestine with commanders who truly appreciated their service. There they fought against and eventually helped defeat the Ottoman Empire.



Some men of the B.W.I.R. outside their tent in the desert

In the Middle East, the British West Indies Regiment were able to use the machine gun. This was a new weapon at the time and being allowed to use it was a unique opportunity that they seized and were successful at.

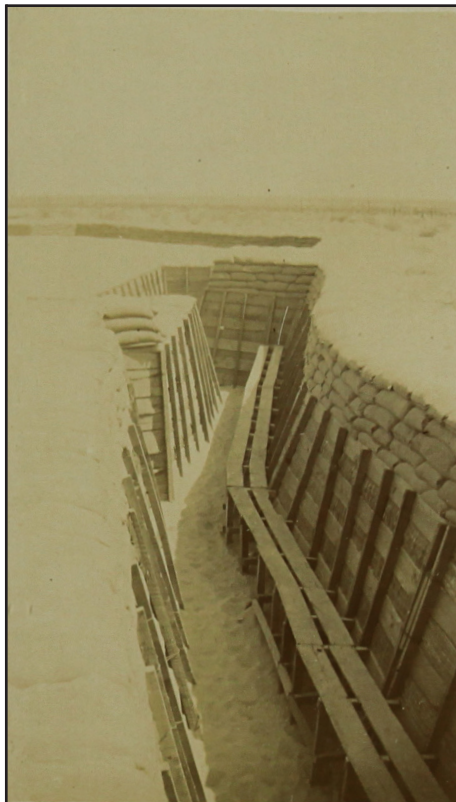


A B.W.I.R soldier by the wreckage of a tank

General Allenby said the following after having fought with them in Palestine:

"I have great pleasure in informing you of the excellent conduct of the machine-gun section of the 1st B.W.I.R. during two successful raids on the Turkish trenches. All ranks behaved with great gallantry under heavy rifle fire and shell fire, and contributed in no small measure to the success of the operations."

The British West Indies Regiment fought in the following battles:



A B.W.I.R trench in Palestine

*Messines 1917
Ypres 1917
Polygon Wood
Broodseinde
Poelcappelle
Passchendaele
Pursuit to Mons
France and Flanders 1916–18
The Somme
Italy 1918
Rumani
Egypt 1916–17
Gaza
El Mughar
Nebi Samwil
Jerusalem
Jaffa
Megiddo 1918
Nablus
Palestine 1917–18*

You can read more about the British West Indies Regiment during the First World War in our Caribbean's Great War e-book, available at www.westindiacommittee.org/caribbeansgreatwar

FACT FILE

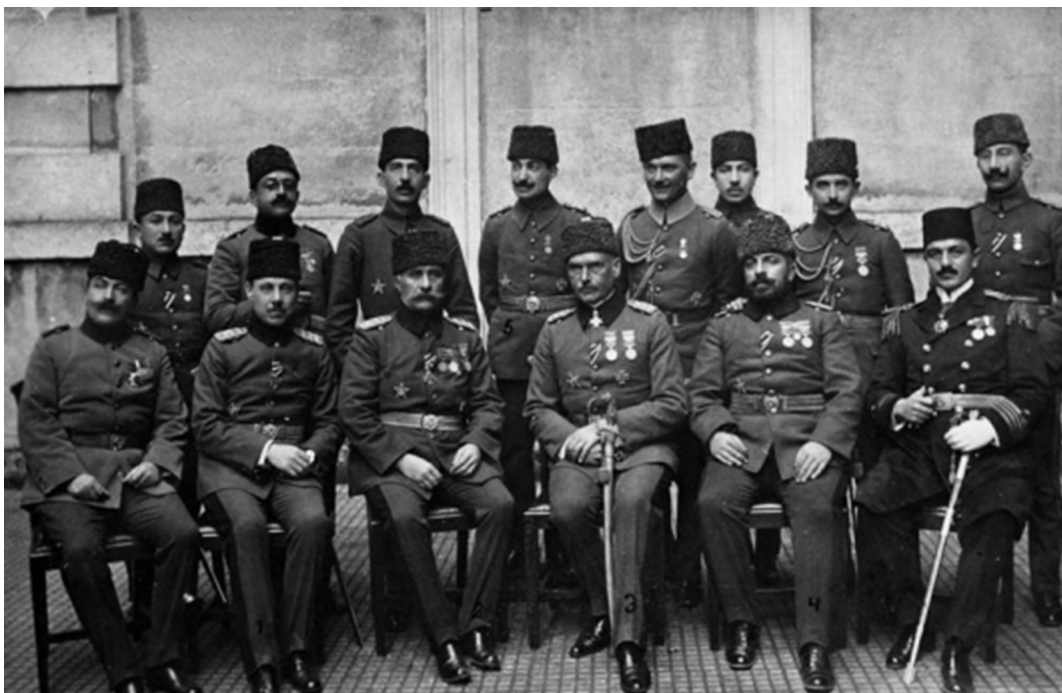
The Ottoman Empire



A map of the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire, also known as the Turkish Empire, was an Islamic empire founded in 1299 that slowly spread across the Middle East and Europe. At its height in the 17th century it was one of the most powerful and influential empires in the world, but it slowly declined. By the 20th century it was considered “*the sick man of Europe*” following a long period of military defeats and was slow to modernise.

In 1914 the Ottoman Empire sided with the German Empire, this meant the British West Indies Regiment were required to fight in Palestine. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire its people became part of many other nations such as Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.



The Generals of the Ottoman Empire

ACTIVITY

Postcards and the First World War



Thousands of postcards were sent back to the Caribbean from the theatres of war. War tax stamps like the one below were sold to raise money for the war effort. Write your own postcard home in the activity box below.



FACT FILE

The British West Indies Regiment's Regimental Badge

All regiments have their own symbol to differentiate them from others and to represent their origins. The Regimental Badge, sometimes known as a cap badge, is steeped in symbolism and has a complex meaning behind it.

A Wreath of Laurel

A wreath is the floral decoration surrounding the oval. This is common in heraldic symbols. In ancient Greece and Rome the laurel leaf (left) represented victory.



Columbus' Ship

The ship in the centre is the Santa Maria, which was captained by Christopher Columbus, the European who discovered the Caribbean in 1492. The ship was chosen to represent both the region generally and the voyage that the men of the Regiment had to make across the Atlantic to fight in the war.

Tudor Crown

The Tudor Crown was chosen because the English settled the Caribbean during the Tudor dynasty (1485-1603) and George V gave them permission to use it.

A Wreath of Palm

The palm wreath (right) symbolises the palm trees of the Caribbean.

The British West Indies Regiment's badge was designed and prepared by the West India Contingent Committee. Cap badges were given to all ranks. It is described as "An oval bordered medallion surmounted by the Tudor crown. On the border, the inscription 'The British West Indies Regiment.' Within, the ship of Columbus in full sail proper. Surrounding the oval, dexter a wreath of laurel and sinister a wreath of palm."

ACTIVITY

Design your own Regimental Badge
for a regiment of your choice

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for the student to draw their own Regimental Badge. The box occupies most of the page below the instructions.

FACT FILE

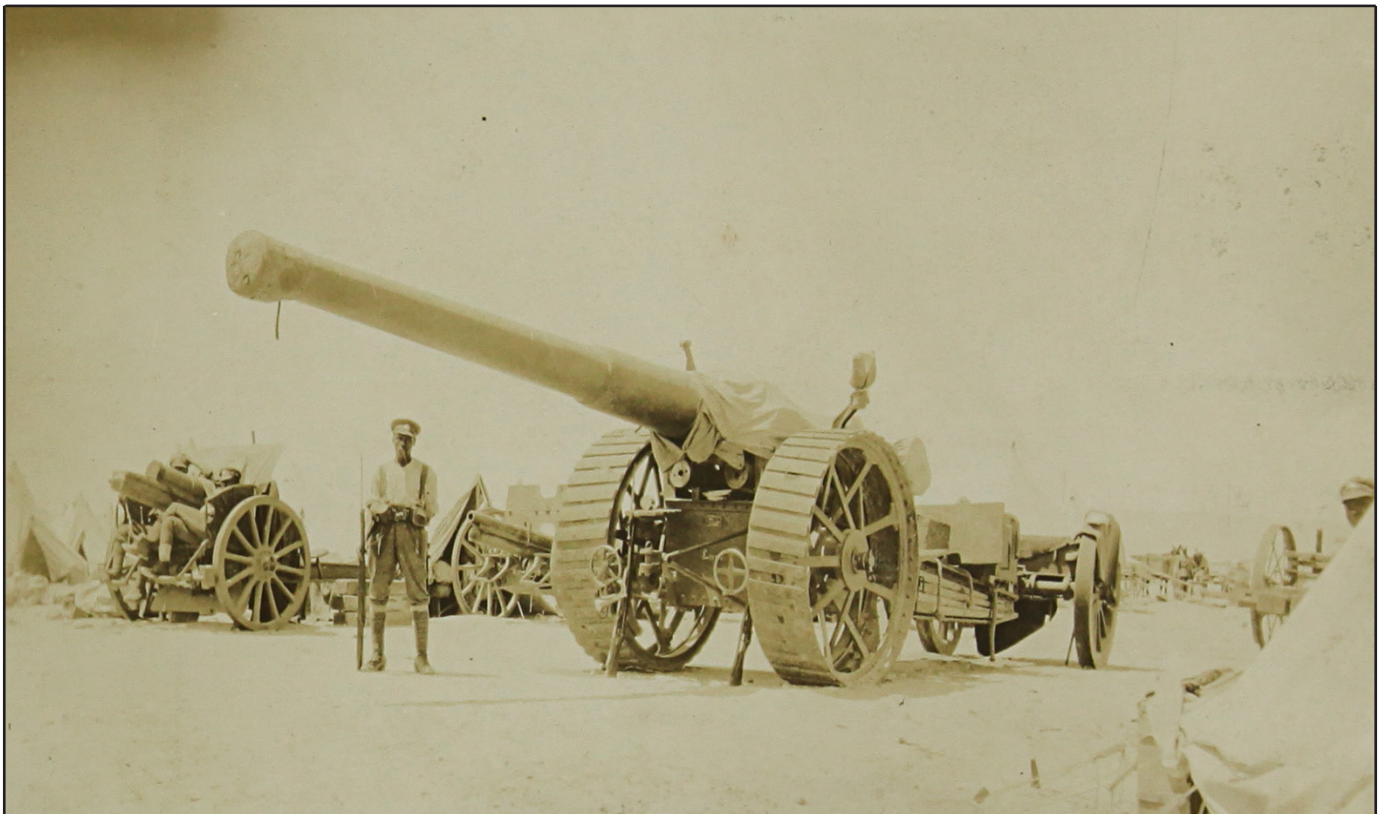
The British West Indies Regiment and the machine gun

The machine gun was a relatively new invention at the outbreak of the First World War. The Vickers machine gun of 1914 required several men to operate it due to its technical complexity and weight. Typically one soldier would feed bullets into the gun while another aimed and fired. The guns would often jam and overheat.

When the British West Indies Regiment fought in Palestine, they were given the unique responsibility of using Vickers machine guns in combat, cutting edge technology for the time. This was significant considering the army originally never intended to use West Indians as soldiers and certainly did not envisage them using machine guns, one of the most modern weapons, in battle. On this page are some images from Palestine of the Regiment in action.



Two soldiers of the B.W.I.R. operate a machine gun

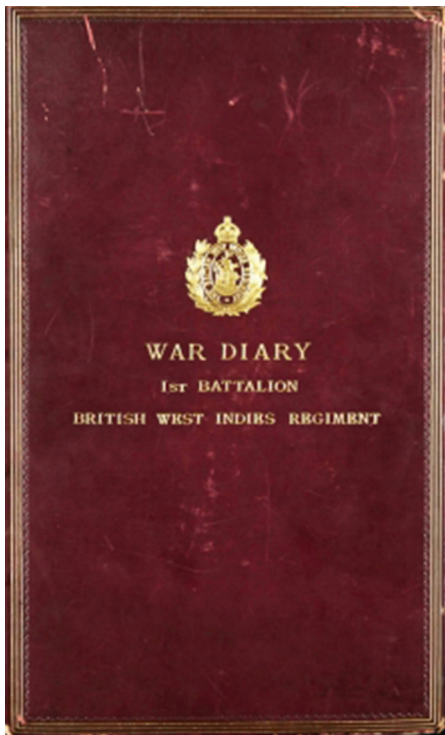


A B.W.I.R. soldier stands beside an artillery gun

ACTIVITY

Write and illustrate your personal War Diary

Colonel Wood Hill, the Commander of the British West Indies Regiment in Palestine, commissioned a War Diary for the regiment after successful operations in the Middle East which he presented to the West India Committee. A War Diary is an account of the battles and engagements experienced by the soldiers. Write and illustrate your own war diary as if you were living at the time of the conflict. Use your imagination to draw pictures of your experience and write a few words to describe it.

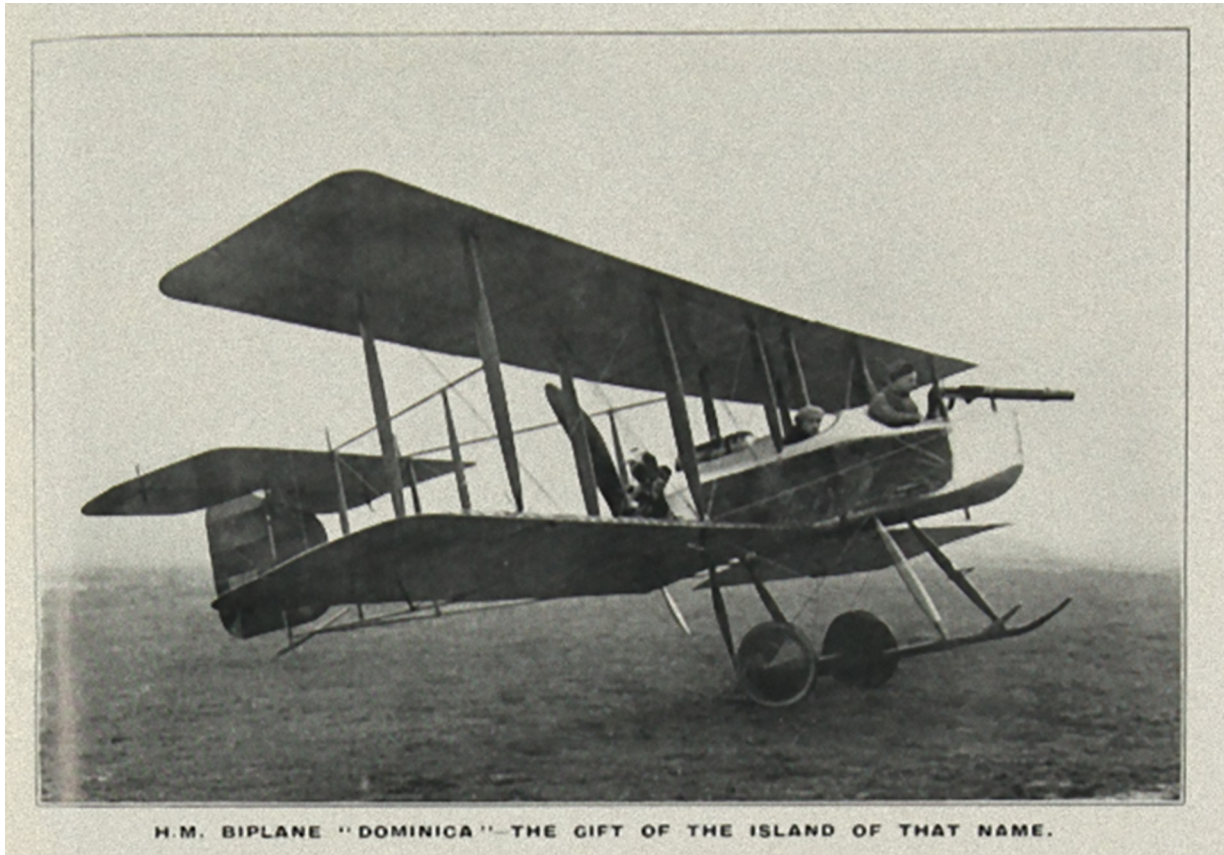


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Aeroplanes and the First World War

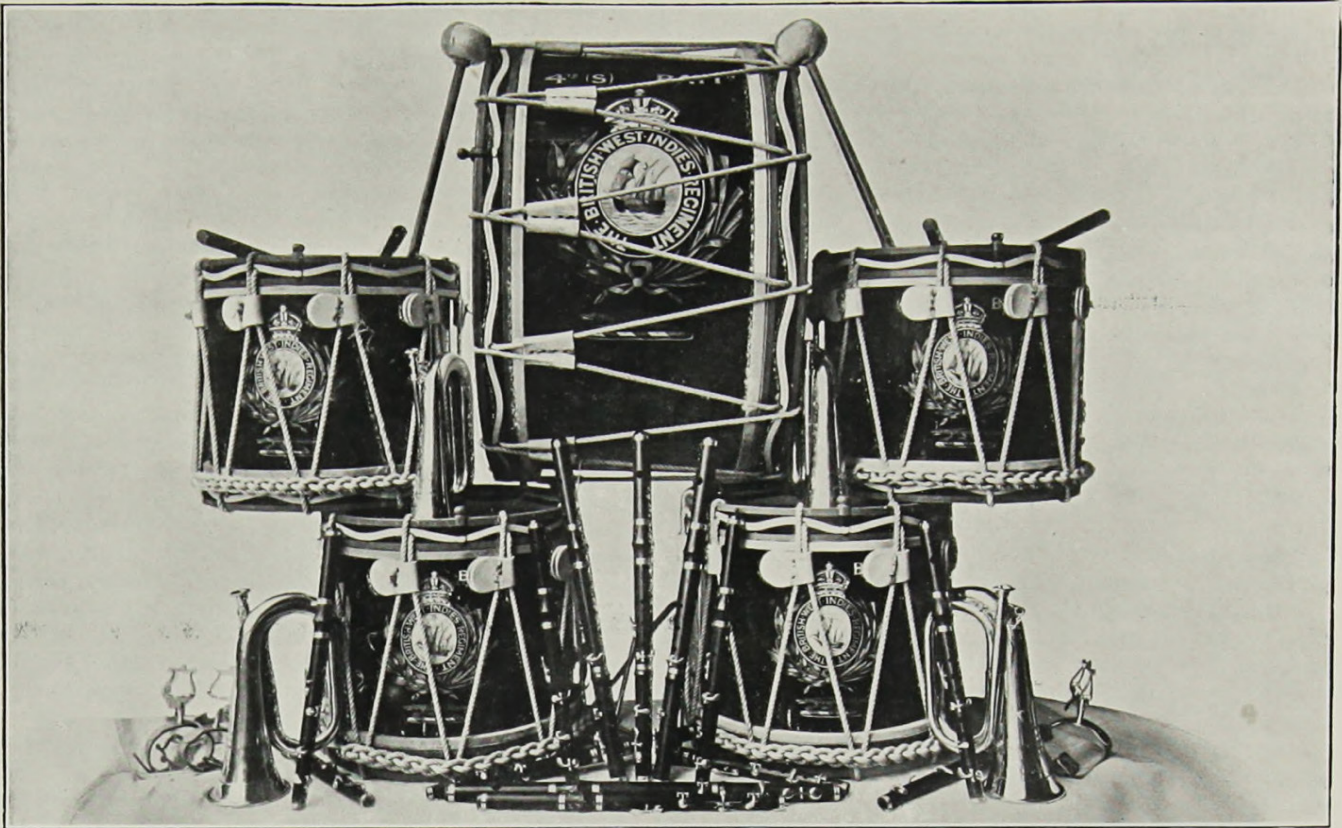
The First World War was the first time nations fought in the air on a mass scale. The war saw the aerial technology advance dramatically and cause a lot of destruction; for example Germany flew its new zeppelins over London in devastating air raids.



Dominica was the first Caribbean island to send a plane to Britain. After purchasing it for the Royal Flying Corps, the forerunner of the Royal Air Force for £4,000 (seen above), it was sent overseas as a gift from the island and bore the island's name.

The Regimental Drum

Every regiment in the British Army has a regimental drum.



THE DRUMS AND FIFES OF A BATTALION OF THE BRITISH WEST INDIES REGIMENT.

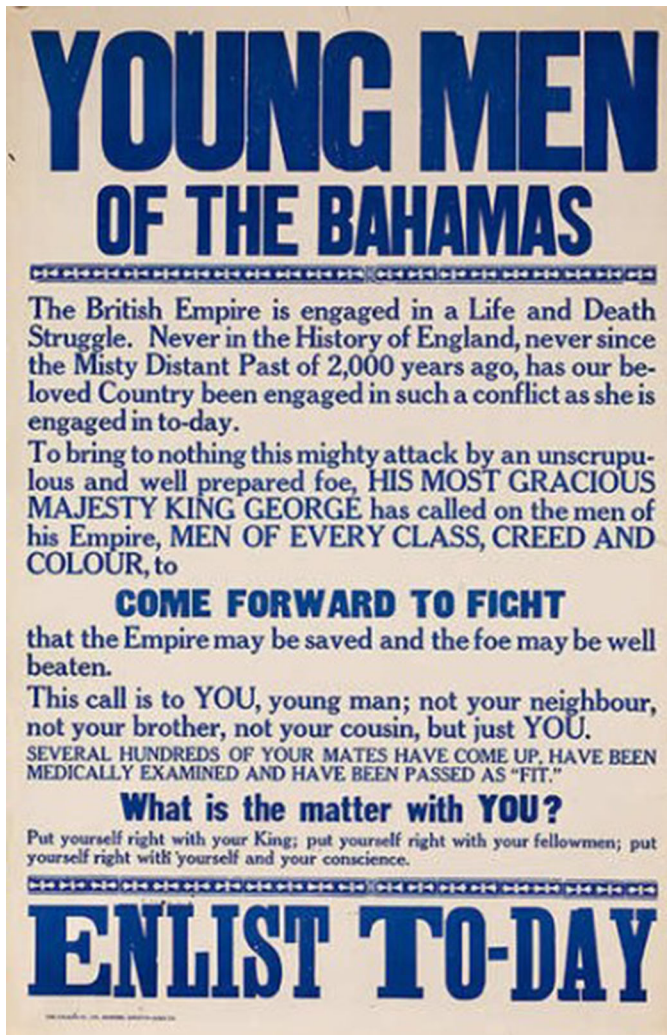
A photograph from the West India Committee Circular of the drums used by a battalion of the British West Indies Regiment during the war



The drums of the 1st Battalion of the B.W.I.R. in Palestine

FACT FILE

First World War Recruitment Posters



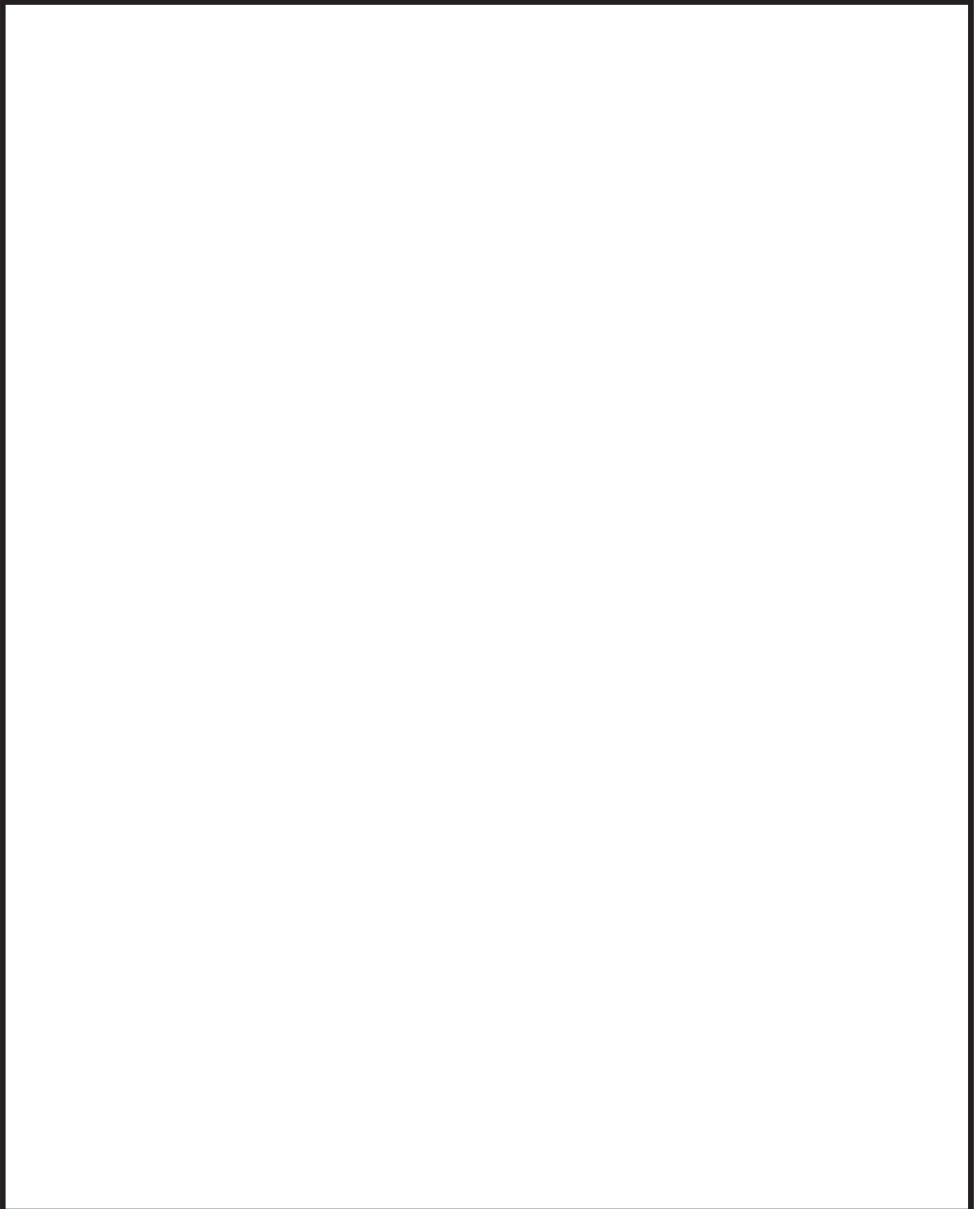
Many types of posters were displayed in public during the war to generate interest in volunteering for the Armed Forces. Some aimed to inspire patriotic sentiment, such as this one from the Bahamas, to reinforce a sense of pride in being an important part of Britain's Empire. This poster importantly calls for men of 'every class, creed and colour' to volunteer, sharing how diverse the Caribbean was and is.

This recruitment poster is from British India, and has a blank space at the bottom where each region could write the message in their own language or dialect. The poster campaigns in India occurred mainly in towns and cities. This one shows an Indian volunteer defending his country, which is coloured red to show it is part of the British Empire.



ACTIVITY

Design your own Recruitment Poster



The West Indian Contingent Committee

The West Indian Contingent Committee was established in 1915 to look after the new West Indian contingents and individual volunteers that had begun to arrive in England.



*The cap badge
of the B.W.I.R.*



*A victory
button given
to B.W.I.R.
soldiers*

The Contingent Committee helped the men of the B.W.I.R. in a number of ways:

- Fought to allow West Indians to enlist and later fought to achieve equal pay for West Indian troops;
- Sent gifts to the troops at Christmas;
- Sent letters and parcels between the men at the front and their friends and family back home in the Caribbean;
- Entertained the men of the B.W.I.R. and other regiments who visited London;
- Supplied the instruments for each battalion's drum and fife band;
- Sent sports equipment, such as cricket bats and footballs, to the men at the front;
- Designed the Regimental Badge and gave a Cap Badge to each B.W.I.R. soldier;
- Looked after wounded West Indian soldiers who were sent back to England, and
- Supplied board and lodging for the soldiers who came to England on leave.



A Ladies Committee was also formed that focused on raising funds to support the West Indian Contingents. They also hosted popular knitting-circles where much needed warm clothing was hand made and sent to men at the training camps and the Western Front.



NOTES

Egypt. Sinai. Palestine. Syria.

