The Role of the Empire

Over 1 million ethnic minority troops contributed to the British Allied Forces during the First World War. They fought in all theatres of war including the trenches of Western Europe as well as providing auxiliary support and much-needed food and other resources.

The Empire's Indian Army was particularly important. According to David Omissi:

> "The Indian Army, 161,000 strong, seemed an obvious source of trained men, and the Lahore and Meerut infantry divisions were selected for service in Europe. In October, shortly after they arrived, they were fed piecemeal into some of the fiercest fighting around Ypres. Losses were heavy."
> (David Omissi, www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/india_wwone_01.shtml)

When war broke out in 1914, India was experiencing political unrest. The Indian National Congress was pushing for more self-government and the Germans had fostered anti-British sentiment. Many thought that if Britain got involved in a crisis somewhere in the world, Indian separatists would seize the opportunity to advance their cause.

However, when war was declared on August 4th, India rallied to the Empire's cause. Those with influence within India believed that Indian Independence would best be served by helping Britain. Offers of financial and military help were made from all over the country.

Indian Troops

- Over 1 million troops.
- 140,000 saw active service on the Western Front- 90,000 in the front line Indian Corps and some 50,000 in auxiliary battalions.
- Khudadad Khan became the first Indian to be awarded with the Victoria Cross.
- Nearly 70,000 troops served in the Middle East, fighting against the Turks in the Mesopatamia campaign.
- Troops served on the Gallipoli peninsula, and others went to East and West Africa, even China.
- Participants from the Indian subcontinent won 13,000 medals, including 12 Victoria Crosses.
- By the end of World War One 47,746 Indians had been reported dead or missing; 65,126 were wounded.
- Sikhs formed 20% of the Indian Forces despite comprising only 2% of India's population.

Caribbean Troops

- 15,600 men of the British West Indies Regiment served with the Allied Forces.
- Jamaica contributed two-thirds of these volunteers, while others came from Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, the Bahamas and Granada.
- The British West Indies Regiment saw front line Service against the Turkish Army in Palestine and Jordan.
- Out of a population of 1.7 million in the Caribbean Colonies of the British Empire, over 1,200 were killed or died. 2,500 were wounded. 81 medals were won for bravery and 49 men were mentioned in despatches.

African Troops

- Africans from many countries served with the Allied Forces during World War One, as front line troops and in auxiliary roles.
- Participants came from Nigeria, the Gambia, South Africa, Sierra Leona, Uganda, Kenya and the Gold Coast.
- Many saw active service in the campaigns to capture the German- controlled territories of Togo, Cameroon, German South West Africa and German East Africa.
- 55,000 men from the British Empire's African Colonies served as combatant soldiers, and many thousands more as carriers and auxiliary troops.
- An estimated 10,000 were killed or died while serving and 166 decorations were awarded to Africans.

Chinese Troops

- By the outbreak of World War One Britain held territories within China and South East Asia, where through active recruitment they formed the Chinese Labour Corps.
- They were taken from China, Hong Kong and Singapore to Europe.
- They were not allowed to fight but they were in support of the troops who were in the front line.
- They carried heavy loads, transported equipment, ran the railways, worked at the docks, and as the war progressed they became skilled mechanics, and repaired tanks and vehicles.
- Almost 1,000 Chinese died as part of the Allied Effort in World War One.

The Curious Incident of the Gurkha Knife was an Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.