

## Report for CWGC Non-Commemorated Committee

### Summary of scoping work on 'Punjab Registers' & Indian Army Casualties

#### *Introduction*

The Indian Army fought across the globe during the First World War, in theatres from France and Flanders, through East Africa, Egypt, Mesopotamia and Palestine. Indian Army forces fought independently and alongside the other armies of the British Empire and their allies. It is estimated that around 1.5 million Indians served with the Indian army, two-thirds as combatants and one third providing logistical support, making India the second largest imperial manpower contributor to the Great War, providing more men than all of the Dominion nations and other colonies put together.<sup>1</sup> The Commonwealth War Graves Commission casualty database commemorates 73,923 individuals who died whilst serving with Indian Forces in the Great War.<sup>2</sup> However, for a variety of reasons, precise casualty figures for the Indian Army are difficult to assess.<sup>3</sup>

#### *The Punjab Registers*

An important collection of contemporary records, recently digitised and acquired by the United Kingdom Punjab Heritage Association, offers new insights into the scale and distribution of Indian Army casualties. The 'Punjab Registers' comprise some 25,000 pages detailing around 300,000 names of participants in the First World War (as well as in post-war engagements on and beyond India's northwest frontier, including the Third Anglo-Afghan War and the Waziristan campaign). The registers, first compiled c. 1920, were produced by District Soldiers Boards, under the direction of the Punjab Soldiers' Board, itself a provincial branch of the Indian Soldiers' Board. The Boards, which evolved from wartime recruiting organisations, were constituted in 1919 to disseminate information and oversee welfare provision and dispute resolution to assist in the resettlement of demobilised soldiers. As a mechanism for the civil and military authorities to address veteran's concerns, the DSBs assumed particular importance after 1920 as anti-colonial agitation increased in rural Punjab.<sup>4</sup>

Organized geographically by district, sub-district (Tehsil) and village, the Registers record details of those who served in the Indian Army during the First World War, including personal and service details (father's name, caste; regiment, distinctions, casualty information; see Figure 1, below).<sup>5</sup> The Registers thus provide a unique and granular record of Punjab's role as the Raj's principal recruiting ground. As such, they offer the potential to

---

<sup>1</sup> Kaushik Roy, *Indian Army and the First World War 1914-18* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 11, 56. The largest imperial manpower contributor was Britain with just over 5 million.

<sup>2</sup> This figure, however, is not exclusively Indian as it includes British officers of the Indian Army as well as British Army personnel who served with Indian forces.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp. 56-59.

<sup>4</sup> Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: The Military Government and Society in Colonial Punjab, 1849-1947* (London: Sage, 2005), pp. 141-186.

<sup>5</sup> Punjab here including Indian and Pakistani Punjab as well as Himachal Pradesh and much of Haryana, but excluding the 'Princely States' - most notably Patiala, Kapurthala, Jind, Nabha.

## Report for CWGC Non-Commemorated Committee

### Summary of scoping work on 'Punjab Registers' & Indian Army Casualties

complement and extend CWGC data on Indian Army casualties, and to assess the scale of any omissions in these data.

Serial No.	Name of village.	Name, father's name and caste.	Unit with which served and rank.	Destination gained if any.	If he died, state this and such further particulars.	If wounded or invalided.
------------	------------------	--------------------------------	----------------------------------	----------------------------	--	--------------------------

Figure 1. Example of headings in Punjab Registers (Ferozepur 4 register)

For example, Figure 2, below, shows an extract from the Punjab Registers (Ferozepur 4), in which the first five entries record deaths said to have occurred c. 1915-1919. With varying degrees of confidence, four of the casualties recorded in the Register can be found in the CWGC database; one – Serial no. 2, Kartar Singh, died 16 November 1918 – does not appear in the CWGC database.<sup>6</sup>

1	Lopen.	Bachar Singh, son of Nard Singh, Jat Sikh.	Regiment NO: 58	Inf.	Died on 10-5-19.	
2		Kartar Singh, son of Jivan Singh, Subedar Jat Sikh.	Regiment NO: 27	Sepoy.	" on 16-11-18.	
3		Jivan Singh, son of Gurdar Singh, Jat Sikh	Regt: NO: 58,	Sepoy.	" on 26-9-15	
4		Puran Singh, son of Hazari, Jat Sikh.	" " 56,	"	Died in Active Service.	
5		Mihal Singh, son of Kaka, Jat Sikh.	" " 58,	"	Died on 7-17.	
6		Lal Singh, son of Bagan Singh, Jat Sikh.	" " 58,	"	Granted 1 Medal	Wounded and retired on pension
7		Ganda Singh, son of Gurdar Singh, Jat Sikh.	Artillery NO: 26	Gunner.	- do -	- do -
8		Kala Singh, son of Bahali, Jat Sikh.	Regt: NO: 59,	Sepoy.	- do -	- do -
9		Amar Singh, son of Jaimal Singh, Jat Sikh	" " 59,	"	- do -	- do -
10		Mera Singh, son of Ram Singh, Jat Sikh.	" " 58,	"	Granted 1 Medal.	- do -

Figure 2. Extract of a page from a Punjab Register (Ferozepur 4 register)

To assess the congruence of the Punjab Registers and the CWGC database, a wider sampling exercise was conducted on nine of the Punjab Registers covering six districts (Ferozepur, Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar, Jhelum, Rawalpindi and Rhotak). 213 fatalities were randomly selected and compared to the CWGC casualty database. This revealed that in 132 (62%) cases a match with the CWGC data could not be found, and further twelve (5.6%)

<sup>6</sup> Serial 1. Potential match with CWGC casualty number 1449135 – Date of death given as 9 May 1915 and village does not match; Serial 2. No match found; Serial 3. Very good match with CWGC casualty number 1447599 – Village given as Lopoke and date of death different by one day; Serial 4. Positive match with CWGC casualty number 1665211 – Father's name given as Hazara; Serial 5. Very good match with CWGC casualty number 1419805 – Father's name given as Gurditt Singh.

## Report for CWGC Non-Commemorated Committee

### Summary of scoping work on 'Punjab Registers' & Indian Army Casualties

cases only a possible match was identified. A summary of the sampling data, with provisional conclusions, is appended.

To evaluate the apparent discrepancies between the Registers and the CWGC database, a small case study has been undertaken on the 29<sup>th</sup> Punjabis during their deployment to East Africa as part of Indian Expeditionary Force (IEF) C. The 29<sup>th</sup> arrived in Mombasa on 1 September 1914 and suffered their first serious casualties in an engagement near Tsavo on 4 September. Cross-checking the HQ War Diary (Figure 3) against the CWGC database and the Punjab Registers reveals that, of the seven casualties listed in the HQ War Diary, all seven are recorded in the CWGC database, of whom three have been identified in an initial search of the Registers.<sup>7</sup> While more work will be required this preliminary analysis suggests that the Registers, in conjunction with the extensive collection of War Diaries and Casualty Appendices held at the British Library and the National Archives of India, may be used to extend and refine extant CWGC data.

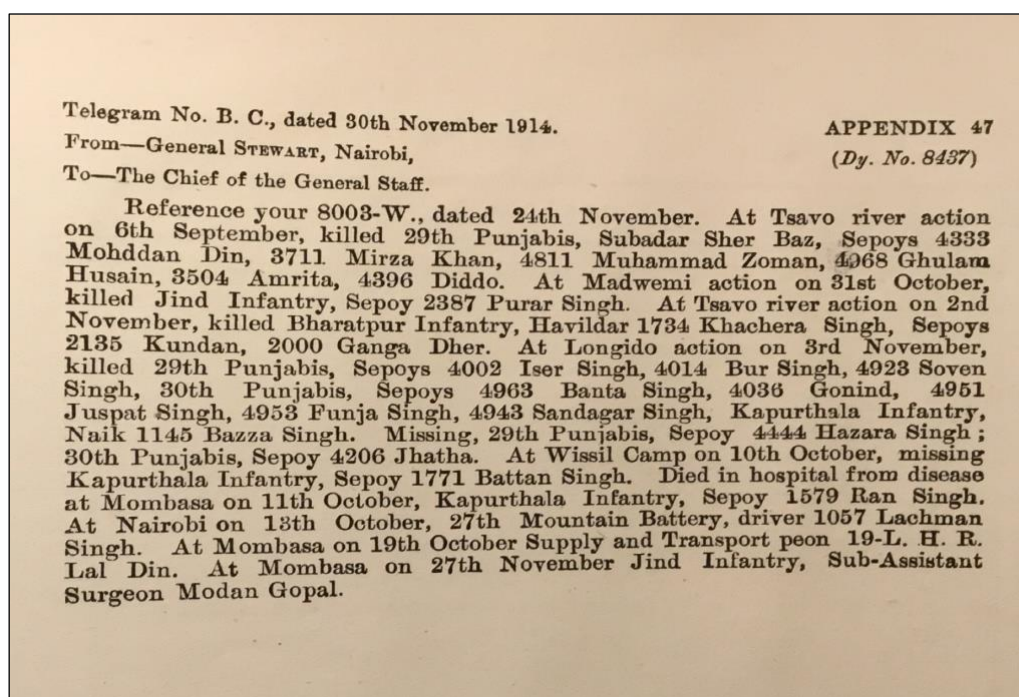


Figure 3. Extract from L/Mil/15/5/3222 War Diary Army Headquarters, India, I. E. F. "C" Volume 4 November 5<sup>th</sup> to December 4<sup>th</sup> 1914.

Some context for the apparent discrepancies may be provided by the fact that the IWGC, apparently at the behest of the Indian Army, adopted several different approaches to registering and commemorating Indian war dead. For example, the General Officer Commanding Mesopotamia, citing advice from Umar Hayat Khan, directed that the graves registration authorities should concentrate their efforts on British graves only.<sup>8</sup> Further correspondence (Figure 4) indicates that there was no appetite to disinter and cremate 'Hindu' casualties nor was there any pressure to locate isolated graves while subsequent

<sup>7</sup> British Library, India Office Records (IOR), L/Mil/15/5/3222, War Diary Army Headquarters, India, I. E. F. "C" Volume 4 November 5<sup>th</sup> to December 4<sup>th</sup> 1914. Unlike the Unit War Diary at the National Archives (WO/95/5340/7) this HQ diary includes a detailed report of casualties at p. 41 Appendix 47. NB: Work is ongoing to check all of the Punjabi Registers for the other four casualties, but this work is slow as some registers are handwritten and lack indexes.

<sup>8</sup> WG 909/5 Indian Graves Indian Graves in Gallipoli Mesopotamia and Asia Minor

**Report for CWGC Non-Commemorated Committee**  
**Summary of scoping work on 'Punjab Registers' & Indian Army Casualties**

correspondence confirms that burial records and returns for Indian Army casualties were not sent to the Graves Registration Unit (Figures 5 and 6). As the archival evidence suggests that the IWGC adopted different policies across the various theatres (see also Figure 7), one objective of future research on the Punjab Registers should be to assess possible impacts of these policies on the congruence of the CWGC and Punjab Registers data.

*Provisional conclusions*

The Punjab Registers offer a unique perspective on the service of Indian soldiers and followers during, and immediately after, the First World War.

Initial assessments suggest a reasonable level of confidence may be placed in the Registers, though more work will be required to explain apparent anomalies – not least the significant proportion of casualties recorded in the Registers but not in the CWGC database identified in the random sampling exercise described above.

Further work to cross-check discrepancies and omissions (vis-à-vis War Diaries, Casualty Appendices, CWGC Archives etc) should be undertaken. As the case study of the 29<sup>th</sup> Punjab illustrates, corroborating evidence (for the Registers and CWGC data) can be found in British and South Asian archives, suggesting that further work might significantly extend our understanding of how complete the CWGC data currently is.

*George Williams (Independent scholar)*  
*Gavin Rand (University of Greenwich)*  
*Amandeep Madra (UKPHA)*

October 2020



**Report for CWGC Non-Commemorated Committee**  
**Summary of scoping work on 'Punjab Registers' & Indian Army Casualties**

Copy of a code telegram from General, Baghdad, to Troopers, London, No.A.1717 dated the 18th February 1919.

With reference to correspondence ending with your telegram of 10th January No.99785, D.G.R.

I do not understand that it is the intention that all buried Hindus bodies should be disinterred and cremated.

There is no demand for such action in this force and the labour involved would render the scheme impracticable.

Further, the necessity for the removal of isolated graves and their inclusion in the larger cemeteries has not been felt in this country to any extent, as the graves lie in desert and uninhabited country and further identification of exact locality required for purposes of exhumation generally not forthcoming, except in established cemeteries.

I propose therefore to adopt the suggestions contained in para 5 of Mr. Pattani's note on the subject.

GENERAL, BAGHDAD.

Figure 4. Extract from WG 909/5 Indian Graves Indian Graves in Gallipoli Mesopotamia and Asia Minor

Copy of letter No.A-1764/348 dated G.H.Q. M.A.F. 17th June 1919, from the D.A.Q. M.A.F. to Major Hilson, Indian Army.

The policy regarding the graves of Indians in this Force is as follows:-

CREMATIONS. In the case of Hindus, cremation is adopted in very few cases - due to the lack of firewood. It is carried out to a modified extent at the Base. No arrangements have been made to send to India the ashes of Hindus cremated.

CEMETERIES. Graves of Mahomedans and Hindus in recognized cemeteries are marked with wooden ~~boards~~ name-boards.

ISOLATED GRAVES. No removals of bodies for reinterment or cremation have taken place. I attach copies of correspondence with the War Office in which our difficulties were represented and of their agreement with our proposals.

FUTURE POLICY. As firewood becomes more easy to obtain or oil fuel can be substituted, it is intended that the Hindus should receive more opportunities for cremation. When this is accomplished, boxes for the return to India of the ashes will be provided should there prove to be any demand for this. The boxes would be sent by the cremation party to the Records Office whence they would be despatched to the deceased's Depot for the next-of-kin. No change is anticipated as regards Hindus or Mahomedans who may be buried.

General Policy regarding Indian Cemeteries. We were asked by India to select suitable headstones for the graves of Hindu and Mahomedan soldiers in recognized Cemeteries. I enclose a copy of the reply to this enquiry. It is considered that the Memorial referred to would suitably take the place of the Headstones, but it could of course be additional. A Memorial of this sort would be far more appreciated by the Indian than anything we could do in the cemeteries. Probably the officer now en route from the War Office will be in a position to say whether the scheme has been discussed and any decision arrived at.

Signed R.C. Wilson, Lt.Col.  
Deputy Adjutant General.

Figure 5. Extract from WG 909/5 Indian Graves Indian Graves in Gallipoli Mesopotamia and Asia Minor

**Report for CWGC Non-Commemorated Committee**  
**Summary of scoping work on 'Punjab Registers' & Indian Army Casualties**

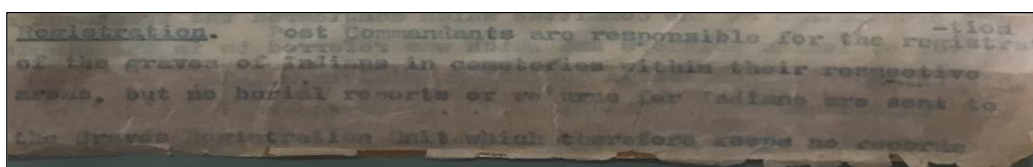


Figure 6. Extract from WG 909/5 Indian Graves Indian Graves in Gallipoli Mesopotamia and Asia Minor

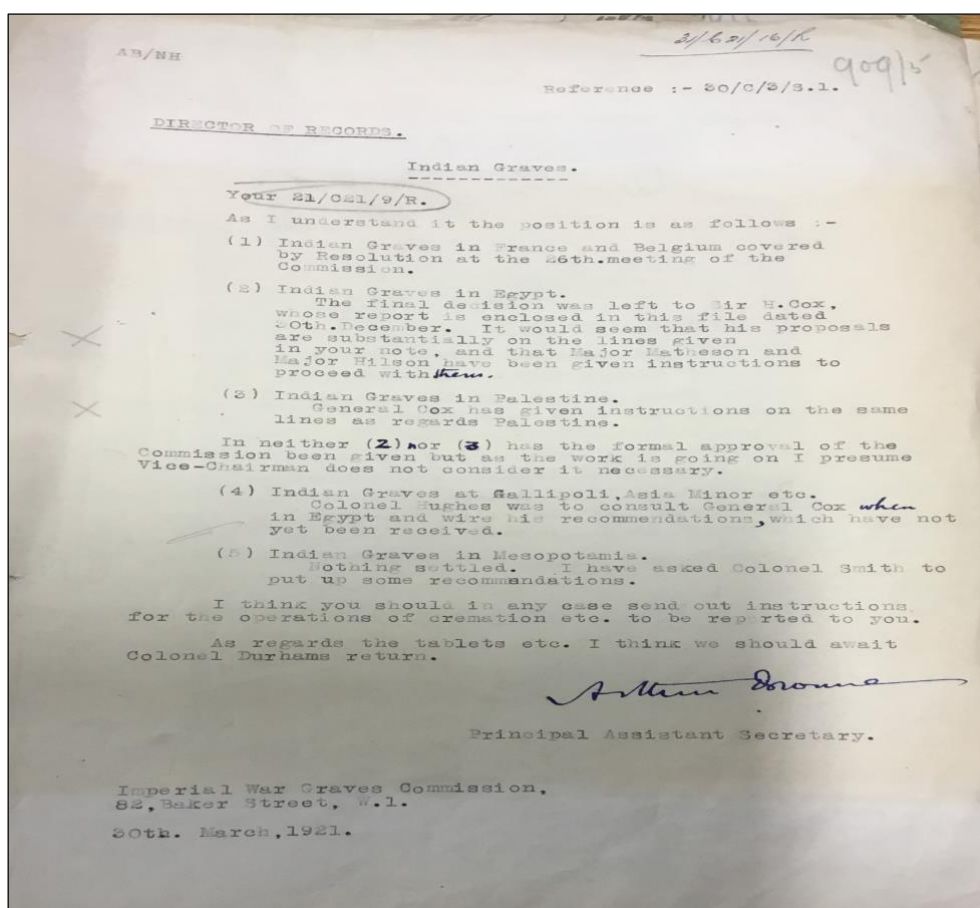


Figure 7. Extract from WG 909/5 Indian Graves Indian Graves in Gallipoli Mesopotamia and Asia Minor