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An interesting 'Monument to the Dead' in the town of Blagny, in the Ardennes, which was in the heart of the fighting. It simply represents a common soldier, from behind, who, before resuming somehow the course of his life, engraves his message in marble **N'OUBLIEZ JAMAIS NEVER FORGET**

## **"THE INDIAN AND CHINESE LABOUR CORP"**

Allied forces tried hard to conceal the help provided by more 300,000 men whose efforts helped defeat the enemy in World War I. Painted out of the picture, the men of the Labour Corps are a largely forgotten army. Some are buried in Alette Indian and Chinese Cemetery **PAGE 2**

**It was once common practice for people (poets) to answer popular poems with another poem.  
Some examples to John McRae's in "Flanders Fields" **PAGE 6****

## Ayette Indian and Chinese Cemetery 1917-1918

### Hidden history preserved in a small corner of Northern France



A few miles south of Arras, along a road tucked in behind the village of **Ayette**, one of those familiar dark green Commonwealth War Graves Commission sign directs you down a unmade lane or track. Two hundred yards or so along the track you reach the Ayette 'Indian and Chinese Cemetery, 1917-1918. The graves of these First World War casualties that are buried at this site are from the **Indian and Chinese Labour Corps**.

The Labour Corps of the First World War comprised mostly of a now largely forgotten multi-ethnic army of tens of thousands of workers (along with British servicemen unfit to fight), without whose manpower the war would have ground to a halt.

These unarmed non-combatants, working under military control, carried out crucial tasks behind the lines on the Western Front and in other theatres of war – building and repairing docks, roads, railways and air-fields, manning ports, stores and ammunition depots, unloading ships and trains, digging trenches and constructing camps.

Britain sustained such appalling losses during the **Battle of the Somme** that virtually every fit serviceman was now needed for fighting. The demand for labour to carry out key logistical work was becoming critical. The government had to look to the Empire and beyond to bolster the existing Labour Corps (formed in 1915) in order to meet the escalating need for workers to support the army.

## Indian Labour Corps

The Indian Labour Corps (ILC), numbering more than half a million men, served across the globe during the First World War. Such support workers had traditionally been integrated into the Indian military and were known as 'Followers.'

Labour battalions composed of men serving with the Indian Corps had been used on the Western Front since September 1915, but steps toward the formation of separate Indian Labour Corps (ILC) were not taken until 1916. The civil authorities in the various Indian provinces were asked to begin recruiting manual labourers



*ILC men from Manipur, India photographed near Arras, France, 20 October 1917 © IWM Q6119*



*LC men working in a forestry camp, Foret de Lyons, France, 23 January 1918 © IWM Q8498*



And the first Indian workers arrived in Marseilles in June 1917. By the end of August over 20,000 workers had been transported to France. Both the Chinese and Indian Labour Corps were administered and directed by officers of European extraction, many of whom were former civil servants or missionaries who were able to communicate with the workers but had little military experience.

The ILC were often used close to the front line, carrying ammunition and building fortifications. They also worked as drivers and cooks, repairing tanks, carrying the wounded and nursing the sick. Despite the hardships of the Western Front, for some, the experience was an improvement on the extreme poverty at home.



COPY.

SPECIAL ORDER OF THE DAY

by Field Marshal Sir DOUGLAS HAIG  
K.T., G.C.B., G.C.V.O., K.C.I.E.,  
Commander-in-Chief, British Armies in France.  
-\*-\*-\*-

It has been a great pleasure to me to receive many reports of devotion to duty, endurance and gallant work on the part of units of the Labour Corps since the commencement of the present battle. These reports have been numerous and are most creditable to all concerned.

I desire to place on record my hearty appreciation of the good work and gallant behaviour of the Labour Corps under most trying circumstances. The discipline and spirit shown by Officers and other Ranks of the Corps have enabled them to respond to many unexpected calls on their services in a manner which has been of the greatest value and assistance to the rest of the Army, and has brought distinction and credit on themselves.

(signed) D.HAIG. F.M.

General Headquarters,  
May 18th, 1918.

Commander-in-Chief,  
British Armies in France.

"E"

## Chinese Labour Corps

In October 1916, the War Office approached the then neutral Chinese government with a plan that would lead to the formation of the Chinese Labour Corps (CLC). The Corps was to be non-combatant but attached to the British army and subject to military control and discipline. The call for volunteers was spread by public proclamation and by British missionaries based in the Chinese provinces. The relatively high pay and other benefits offered to prospective recruits were tempting enough to encourage thousands of men, mostly poor peasants from the northern provinces of Shan-tung and Chihli, to pledge three years' service. The first transport of Chinese labourers made its way to Europe via Canada at the beginning of 1917. By the end of the year there were 54,000 Chinese labourers attached to the Commonwealth forces in France and Belgium; by the Armistice this figure had doubled.



*Chinese Labour corps stacking corn sacks, Boulogne 12 August 1917. © IWM Q2701.*

The CLC was formed into companies of up to 500 men each under the charge of a British officer. They worked 10-hour days, seven days a week and gained a reputation for hard work and ingenuity. They were allowed three days off a year



Throughout 1917 and '18, the men of the ILC and the CLC performed vital transport, maintenance, salvage and construction work on the Western Front and made a major contribution to the Allied war effort. Some labour corps units remained in France after the Armistice and took part in the clearing of the battlefields, a task that involved the exhumation and re-interment of tens of thousands of Commonwealth soldiers. Although they were usually deployed outside the range of enemy guns, hundreds of labourers fell victim to long-range shelling, air raids, and enemy action during the German Spring Offensive in 1918. Illness claimed the lives of many more, particularly during the influenza pandemic of 1918. It is stated that a total of approximately 2,000 Chinese and 1,500 Indian labourers died while serving on the Western Front. These numbers are highly disputed. Many believe they were many times higher.

The Indian and Chinese cemetery at Alette was set up by British troops in September 1917 and used until April 1918. However, Alette was the scene of heavy fighting in March 1918, and the village was captured by German troops during the offensive. It was retaken by the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division on 3 April 1918 and remained in Allied hands thereafter. Interments at Alette resumed in autumn 1918, and although the cemetery claims on its perimeter wall to have burials from 1917-18 it contains a number of later burials from 1919. The cemetery has a lovely little pagoda. It holds 109 members of the Indian Army, 42 men of the Indian labour corps, 33 men of the Chinese labour corps,



It has the full range of inscriptions for the graves. The Imperial War Graves Commission agreed with the Chinese, including 'A Noble Duty Bravely Done', and 'A Good Reputation Endures Forever'. The gravestones are a mixture of English and Chinese or Indian script. Some labour corps units remained in France after the Armistice to help with the clearing of the battlefields, which largely meant the exhumation and re-interment of thousands of Commonwealth soldiers in nominated cemeteries. How many of the Chinese Labour Corps subsequently made their way home is unclear. Apart from those who died, it seems likely that many remained in Europe.

Recruits boarded ships in the Shandong province in eastern China and crossed the Pacific Ocean to the William Head Quarantine Station just outside Victoria. After a brief stay at the ramshackle "Coolie Camp" maintained by the station, the CLC boarded guarded trains headed for the east coast where they would continue their trip on to France.

The Chinese Labour Corps presence in Canada was subject to the deep-seated racism harboured by the Canadian government and citizens, and today, it remains one of Canada's best kept wartime secrets.





## Beautiful Lines

Can any man with good red blood in his veins, and the breath of freedom in his nostrils, read these lines without being stirred to the innermost depths of his soul? Thank God for the Poets; is it any wonder the Allies won the war? Contrast the following lines with the famous or infamous "Hymn of Hate."

### THE CALL.

#### IN FLANDERS FIELDS

By Lieut. Col. John D. McRae, Montreal.  
(Killed in Flanders, January 28, 1918.)

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly,  
Scarce heard amidst the guns below.  
We are the dead, Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe!  
To you from falling hands we throw  
The torch. Be yours to hold it high!  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

### THE ANSWER.

By R. W. Lilliard

(Written after the death of Lt. Col. McCrae.)

Rest in peace, ye Flanders dead,  
The fight that ye so bravely led  
We've taken up. And we will keep  
True faith with you who lie asleep  
With each a cross to mark his bed,  
And poppies blowing overhead,  
Where once his own life blood ran red.  
So let your rest be sweet and deep  
In Flanders fields.

Fear not that ye have died for naught.  
The torch ye threw to us we caught.  
Ten million hands will hold it high,  
And freedom's light shall never die!  
We've learned the lesson that ye taught  
In Flanders fields.

### THE RESULT.

#### "THEY HAVE NOT PASSED."

(By Bomb. McInnes, P.E.I.)

They have not passed! Their scornful sneering lies,  
Their senseless hate and blind brutality.  
Their frantic boasts and unctuous blasphemies  
Have naught availed—to us the victory!  
The suffering, and the sorrow, and the pain,  
The days of fear and nights of anxious dread,  
The watching and the waiting, and the strain  
Of dear uncertainty—all these are fled.

They have not passed! Though blood and fire and tears,  
And blasted hope and bitter agony  
Have been our portion through the barren years—  
Though from the mountains to the cleansing sea  
Their trail of horror sears the patient land,  
And crimson ruin marks the way they came—  
Though all they knew of heart, and head and hand  
They flung against us like a scorching flame,

They have not passed! O ye who died, then know  
We have been faithful to the trust ye gave,  
Nor ever faltered 'neath the sickening blow,  
Lest ye who slumber in the shallow grave  
Should wake to hear the tramp of feet profane,  
And know yourselves betrayed, and so repent  
The sacrifice—O ye for freedom slain,  
We have kept faith, and ye may sleep content—  
They have not passed!

HONOR ROLL: E. A. Dalton, W Francis, W. Batters, M. Barr, R. Tyndall

## OAK HALL The Store for Men

NEEPAWA, - MAN.

