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# French Sikh History

80,000 Sikhs Fought For France's Freedom  
Wearing Their Turbans  
On the Front Line  
During the World Wars

There are Sikhs in 151 Cemeteries in France who  
died Fighting For France's Freedom, Liberty and  
Honour.

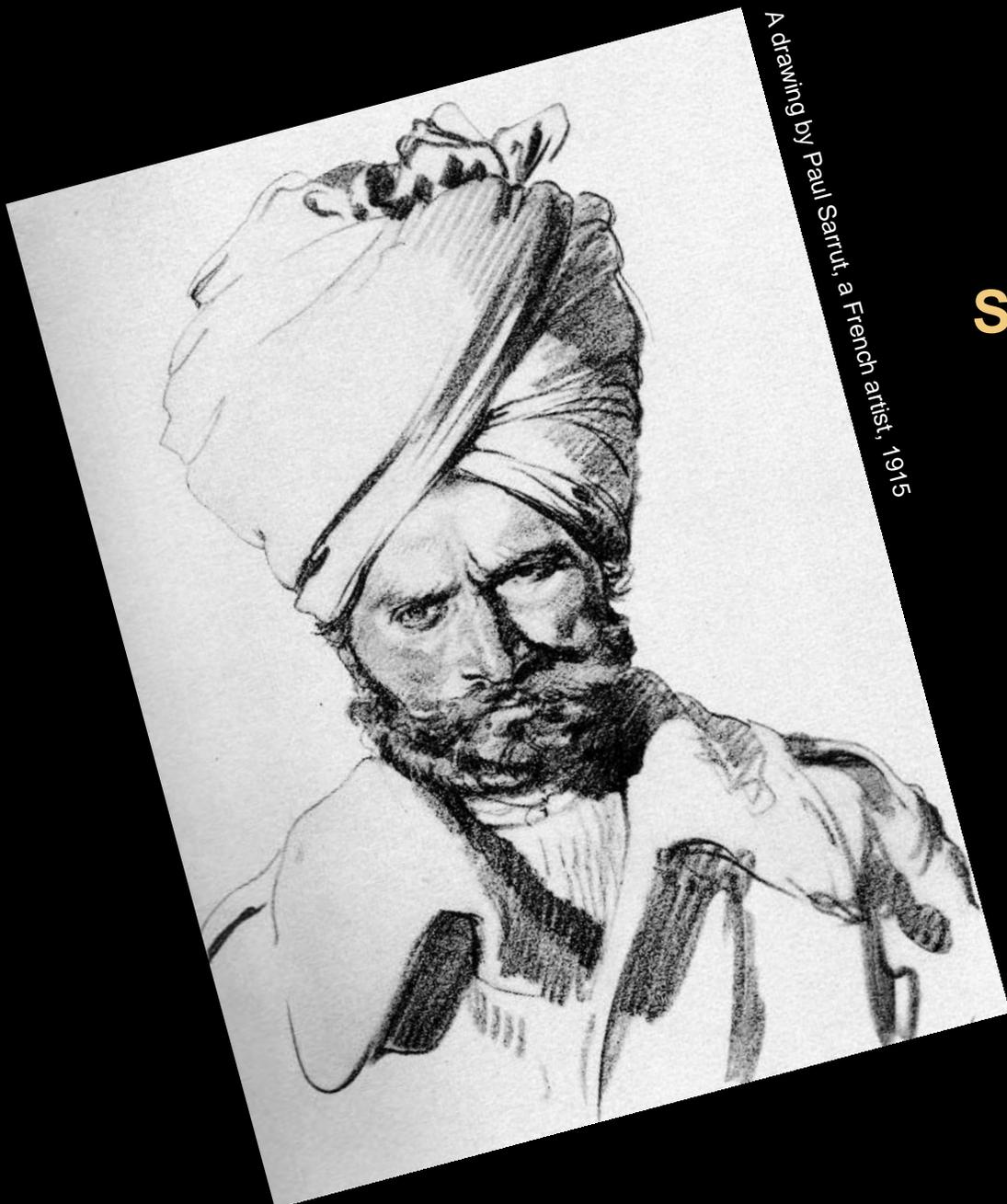


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## Sikhs & Their Turbans

**“We shall cherish above all the memory of their example. They showed us the way, they made the first steps towards the final victory.”**

**— Marshal Foch : French Army  
Signed the Armistice Day  
Document WWI 1918**

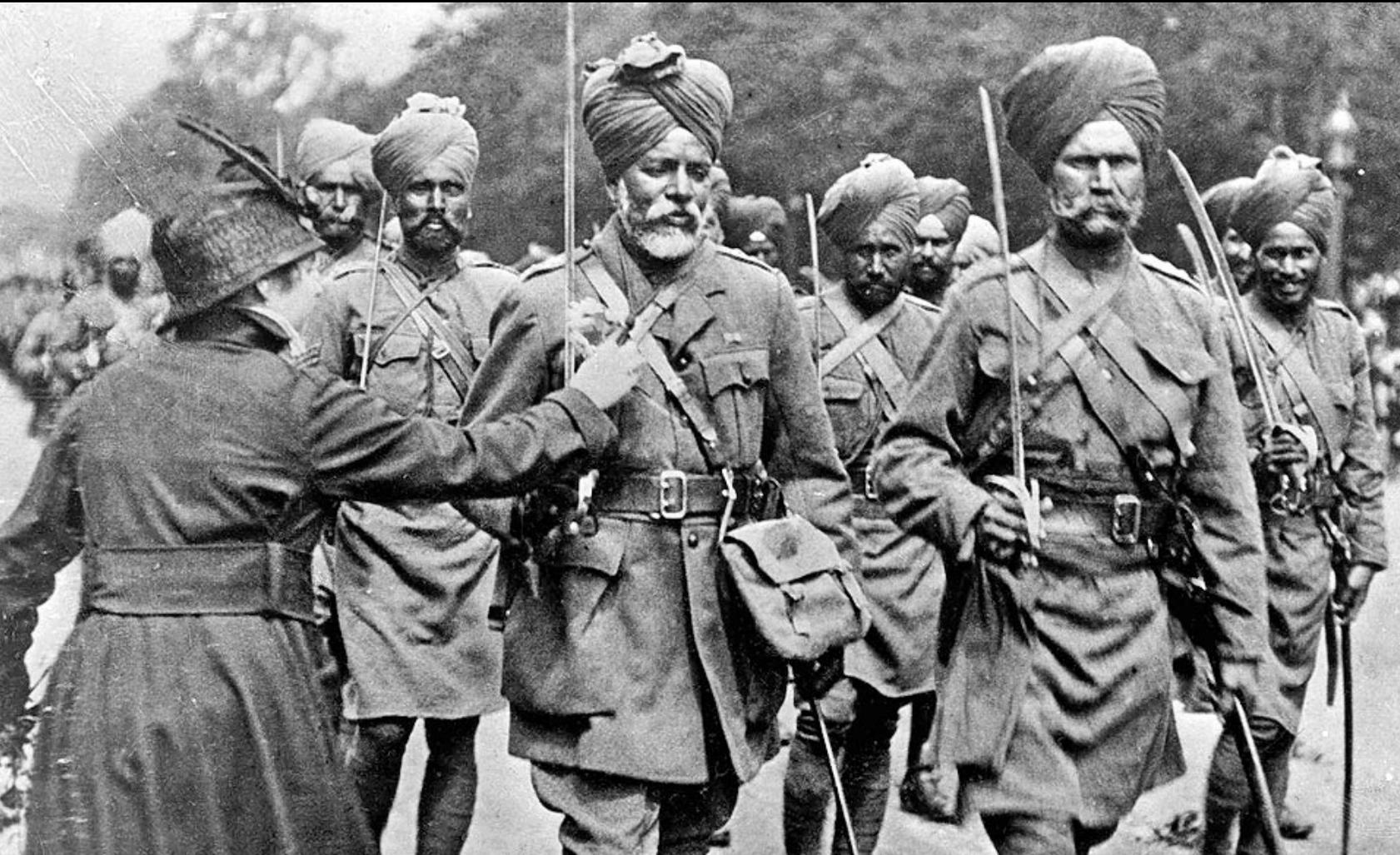


A drawing by Paul Sarrut, a French artist, 1915



**“The scene is one that should be retained on the Empires retina. The hosts of Indian soldiers marched through the streets of Marseilles with the population, especially the female proportion, hanging onto the arms of bewildered Sikhs and Pathans.”**

**The Martial races of India, Lt Gen Sir George MacMunn, 1923**



**“The English and the women of this place [France] are very pleased to see us, like opening flowers. They shake hands with our men when they disembark, and attempt to feed them from their own pocket...”**

**From a letter, dated 15th December 1915, written by a Sikh cavalry soldier at a Marseilles Depot.  
Further Extracts from Reports made by the Censor, Indian Mails in France, British Library.**



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**RESPECT**

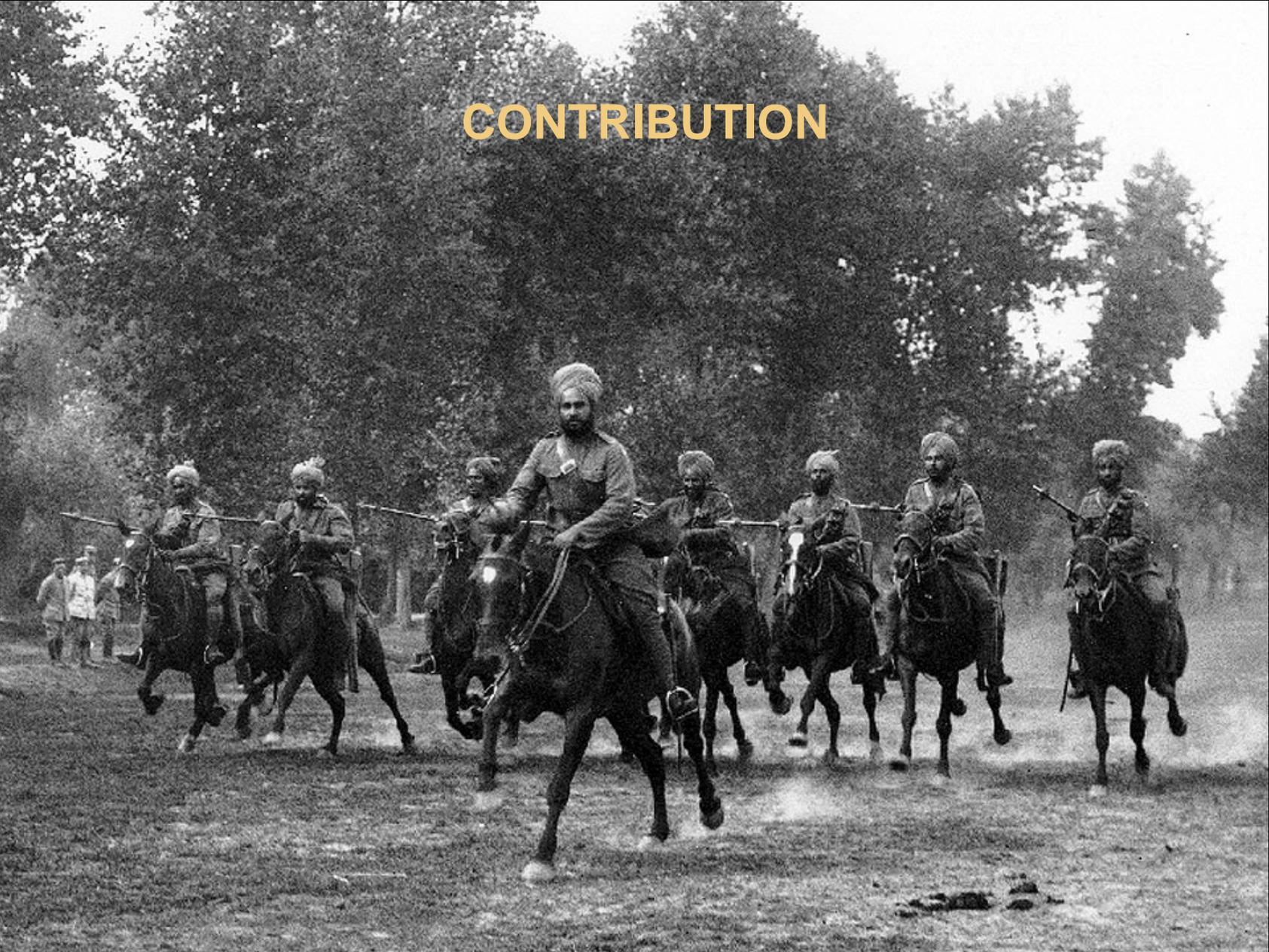
# FRIENDSHIP





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## CONTRIBUTION



# SACRIFICE



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74. *La Guerre Européenne 1914 — Troupes indiennes allant au front - Indian troops going at the front*

J. M. T.



# HONOUR



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Major battles in France during World War I in which Sikh troops fought:



Ypres • La Bassée • Neuve Chapelle • Festubert • Loos • Givenchy • Somme



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## **Sikh Soldiers at the Battle on the Somme, France 1916**

On October 7 Sikh despatch riders with their bicycles at the cross roads of Fricourt and Mametz Road during the Battle of the Somme in July 1916. The bicycles of the two men in the foreground are fitted with a special bracket to support their rifles. The man in front has the rank of Sergeant shown by the stripes on his right shoulder. The loss of life on the Somme was terrible.



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## **Sikh Soldiers World War 1 , Vraignes, France.**

On October 7 Sikh despatch riders with their bicycles at the cross roads of Fricourt and Mametz Road Three members of an Indian regiment carrying their lances, the 9th Hodson's Horse, consult a map near Vraignes, France in 1917. World War One was the last time that cavalry forces were used in battle, the idea being that infantry forces would break through the enemy's frontline defences followed by the cavalry using their superior speed to reach the enemy's rear positions and destroy supply and communications lines. In reality, by the end of the war, many cavalry troops were being used as infantrymen.

# Neuve Chapelle - India's Memorial in France

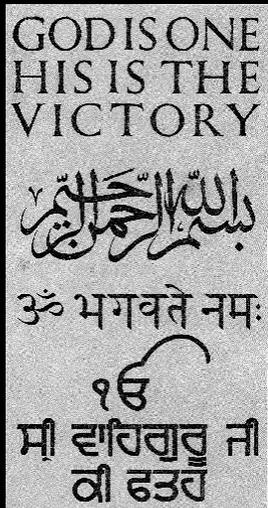


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On October 7, 1927 the noble Memorial at Neuve Chapelle was unveiled in France in memory of all Indian soldiers who fell on the Western Front in the Great War of 1914-1918.

It marked the gratitude of the great French nation which was defended from German invasion by the supreme sacrifices of the British Indian Army in France. It marks the French gratitude of the French people who built it on their soil.

For the ceremony, special units including Sikhs who engaged in the actual war were brought from India.



A tablet bears the following inscription:

TO THE HONOUR OF THE ARMY OF INDIA WHICH FOUGHT IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM 1914-1918, AND IN PERPETUAL REMEMBRANCE OF THOSE OF THEIR DEAD WHOSE NAMES ARE HERE RECORDED AND WHO HAVE NO KNOWN GRAVE.

Neuve Chappelle – India's Memorial in France 1914-1918, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1927.



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## Neuve Chapelle – A Sikh soldier's legacy

In March 1915 the Allies attacked Neuve Chapelle and broke through the German front line. On the first day of the battle, British and Indian troops captured the town. Then the Germans counter-attacked with 16,000 reinforcements.

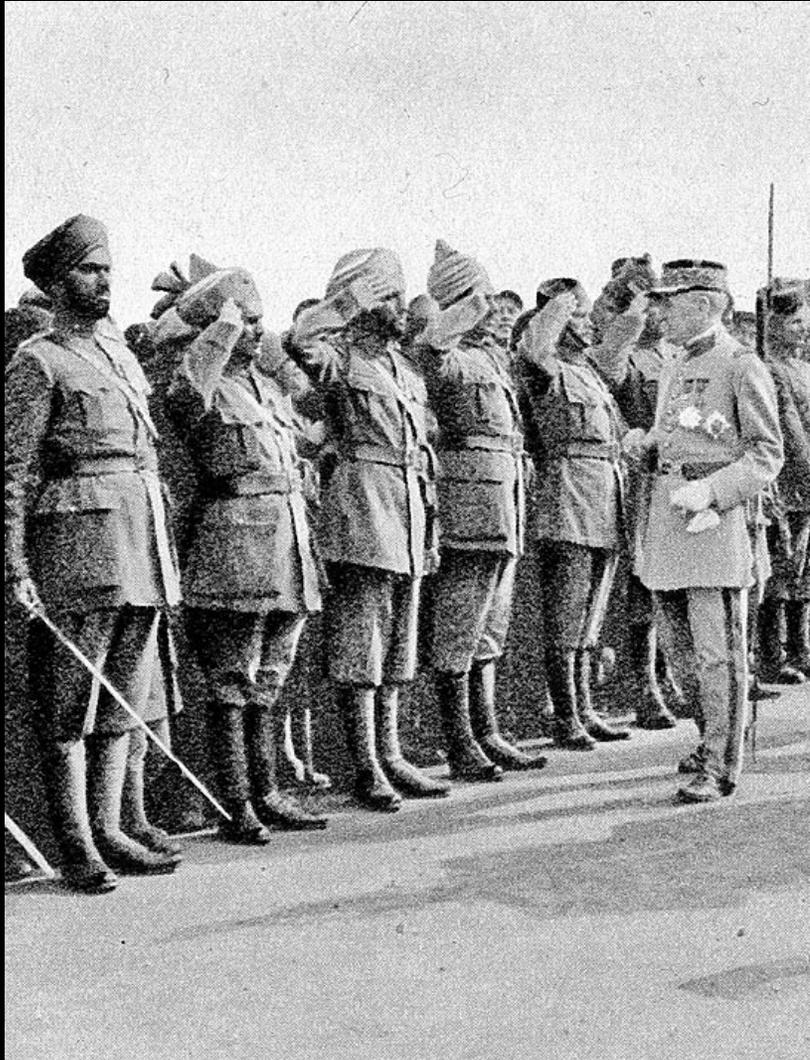
In three days' fighting, the British and Indian troops suffered 13,000 casualties. The Allies' ammunition ran out, and the troops had to retreat. 5,021 Indian soldiers - about 20 per cent of the Indian contingent - were killed in heavy fighting, and Manta Singh was injured in action after helping to save the life of an injured officer, Captain Henderson. (In the Second World War, the sons of both of these men served side by side and became lifelong friends.)

In 1993 Manta Singh's son, Lt Col Assa Singh Johal, was part of a delegation of the Undivided Indian Ex-Servicemen's Association that visited the Indian war memorial at Neuve Chapelle. Assa Singh said, "It was a moving visit of great sentimental value to us. We were able to remember and pay homage to the fallen in foreign lands."

# Neuve Chapelle – Marshall Foch’s testimony



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Speaking in French, Marshal Foch told of India's effort in the Allied cause, how she had raised more than a million soldiers, how she had lost upwards of one hundred thousand men. After telling the story of the battles from the 10th to 13th March, 1915, the Marshal described how the Indian Corps opened the attack.

“The Indian Troops,” he said, “were thus among the first to show the way to a victorious offensive. It is only right that a Memorial should perpetuate the glorious memory of officers, non-commissioned officers, and men of the Indian Army at the very spot where later on a general attack by the Allied troops was to bring the decisive victory in sight.”

Turning to the Indian Contingent, he bade them:

"Return to your homes in the distant, sun-bathed East and proclaim how your countrymen drenched with their blood the cold northern land of France and Flanders, how they delivered it by their ardent spirit from the firm grip of a determined enemy; tell all India that we shall watch over their graves with the devotion due to all our dead. We shall cherish above all the memory of their example. They showed us the way, they made the first steps towards the final victory."

Neuve Chappelle – India’s Memorial in France 1914-1918,  
London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1927



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“In the last two world wars 83,005 turban wearing Sikh soldiers were killed and 109,045 were wounded for the freedom of Britain and the world during shell fire, with no other protection but the turban, the symbol of their faith.”

— General Sir Frank Messervy KCSI, KBE, CB, DSO



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**Hardit Singh Malik, shaking President Coty's hand after receiving the French Legion of Honour Award in 1952.**



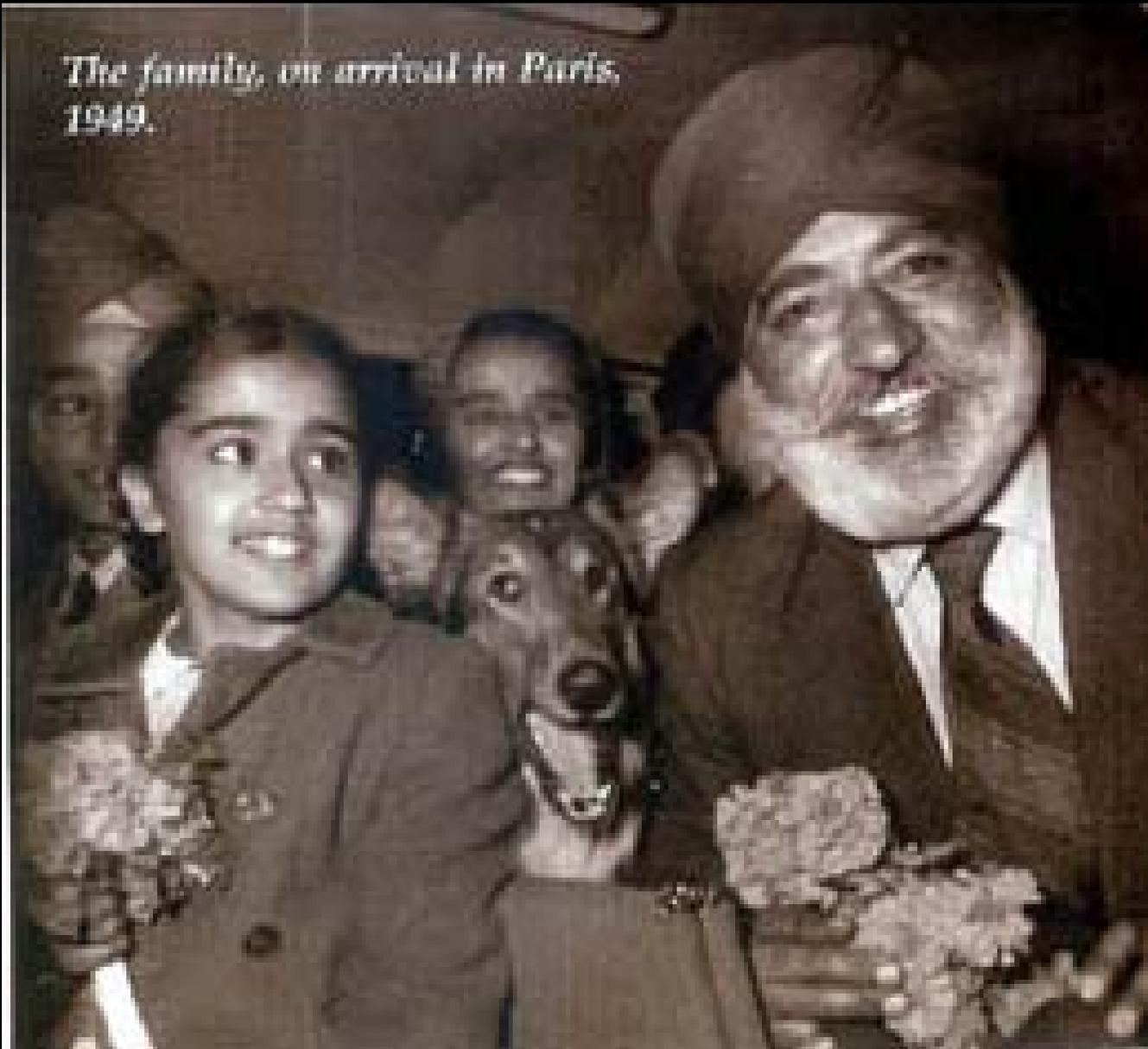
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**Hardit Singh Malik  
received the French  
Legion of Honour  
Award as a fighter pilot  
ace for the French Air  
Force, with 9 victories in  
WWI**



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*The family, on arrival in Paris,  
1949.*



**Hardit Singh Malik visiting Paris in 1949 as an Indian Ambassador to France.**



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Ambassador Hardit Singh Malik, presented officers of the Embassy, to the president. From L to R Shri R. Goburdhun, Counsellor, Brigadier K.C. Khanna, Military Attache, Mr. S.G. Ramachandran, First Secretary (Commercial), Mr. R. Venkateswaran, First Secretary and Mr. P.G. Pendsay, Press Attache.



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*As ambulance driver with French Red Cross, 1916.*

**Hardit Singh Malik, joined as an ambulance driver with the French Red Cross in early 1916.**



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*Hardit and ambulance at the Front.*

**Hardit Singh Malik, an Officer in  
the French Red Cross.**

**Hardit Singh Malik,  
saving French lives with  
the Nursing staff.**



*French Nursing Staff with ambulance.*



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## Sikhs in over 100 French Cemeteries

“In the last two world wars 83,005 turban wearing Sikh soldiers were killed and 109,045 were wounded for the freedom of Britain and the world during shell fire, with no other protection but the turban, the symbol of their faith.”

— General Sir Frank Messervy KCSI,  
KBE, CB, DSO

### The Men Who Turned the Tide on the Yser



The Sikh soldiers marching in our ranks during the Yser campaign. The Sikhs are carried on the backs of mules.



The Sikh soldiers are wounded from the front and carried to the rear where they will pour from their heads.





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Wounded Indian soldiers, according to one source in a French village and another in leper, 31 October 1914. Imperial War Museum, London.



The arrival of Sikh soldiers in Marseilles, 1914. Gentlemen of India marching to chasten German hooligans says a French postcard.



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*Painted specially for this work*

*[By M. Durston.]*

**LIEUTENANT SMYTH AND HIS PARTY OF THE 15TH SIKHS CARRYING UP BOMBS TO THE FIRING TRENCH AT THE FERME DU BOIS**

On May 18th, 1915, a highly critical situation was created in the trenches held by the 15th Sikhs by the supply of bombs running out. The enemy's fire was so severe that the communication trench had been almost obliterated and there was virtually no cover for any party bringing up a fresh supply. Volunteers were called for and Lieutenant Smyth and ten men responded. The distance was 250 yards and their number was speedily reduced as they hauled the boxes of bombs up the battered trench.

## **FERME DU BOIS, France 1914.**

'How Lieutenant Smyth, of the **15th Sikhs**, Won the V.C. and Ten Brave Indians the Indian Distinguished Service Medal, at the Ferme du Bois They were: Sepoys Fattah Singh, Ganda Singh, Harnam Singh, Lai Singh, Naik Mangal Singh; Sarain Singh, Sapooram Singh, Sucha Singh, Sunder Singh, and Ujagar Singh.

There are **no finer fighting men** in our Indian Army **than the Sikhs**, the descendants of those fierce long haired warriors who fought so stubbornly against us at Firozshah and Chilianwala, and afterwards stood so loyally by the British Raj in the dark days of the Mutiny. And there are no finer officers in the world than the men who lead them, for no youngster stands a chance of being gazetted to a **Sikh regiment** who has not shown that he possesses in a marked degree all the qualities which are likely to ensure the confidence and devotion of those whom he aspires to command. *Source from 'Deeds That Thrill the Empire'*



MAXIMS BEING WHIPPED FROM THE MULES AND HURRIED INTO ACTION



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The Indians didn't give them much time to arrive at an understanding. With a shrill yell they rode right through the German infantry, thrusting right and left with their terrible lances, and bringing a man down every time. The Germans broke and ran for their lives, pursued by the Lancers for about a mile. Our swarthy soldiers from the East have been delighted to win the cheers of the British and French troops. *Source from 'T.P.'s Journal of Great Deeds Of The Great War', November 21, 1914*



Indian troops train in France during World War I (1914-1918).

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“ .Le 14 Juillet à PARIS en 1916 ” — Les Cipayes Indiens



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64. A salute to the allies - British Indian Army



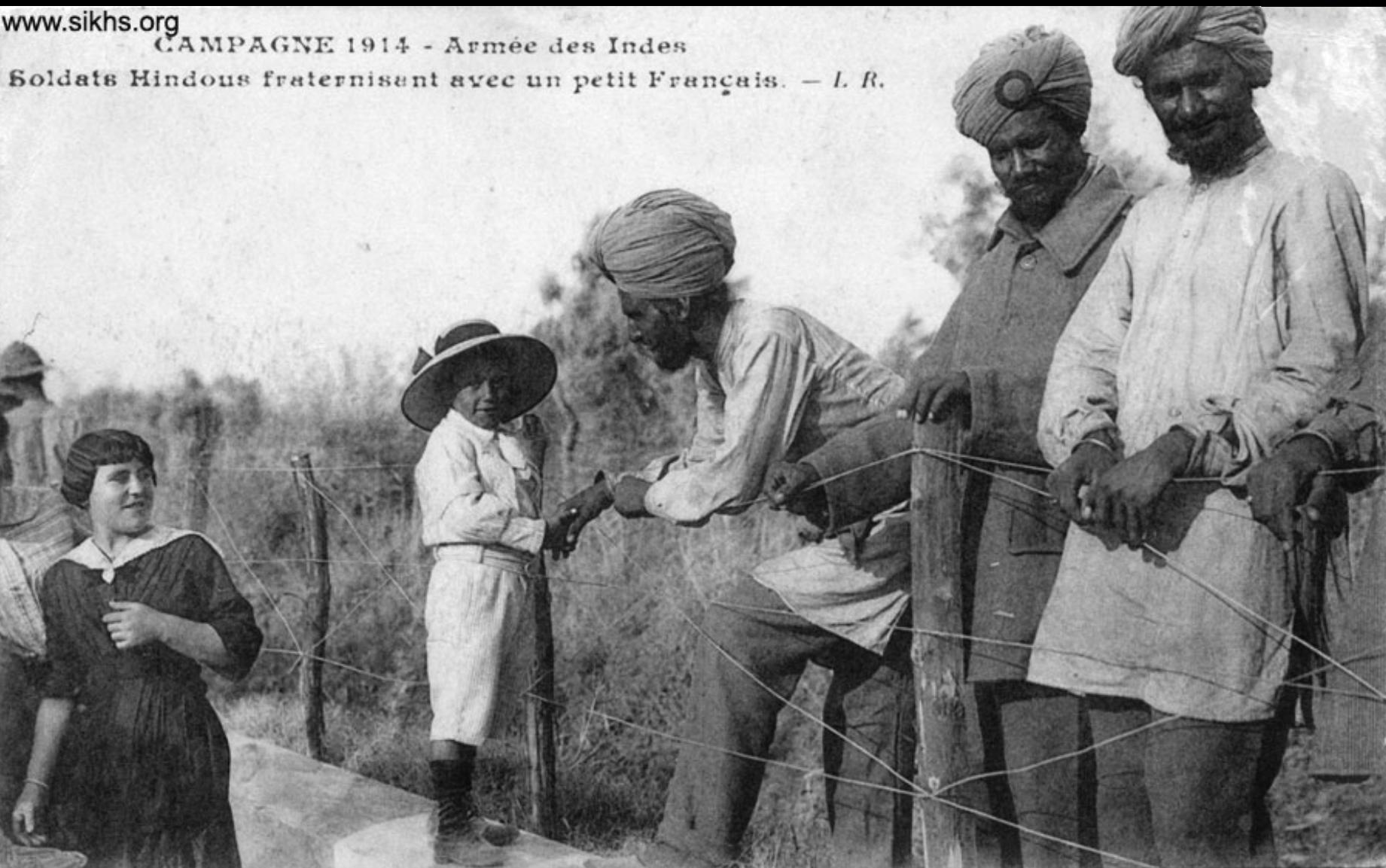


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CAMPAGNE 1914 - Armée des Indes

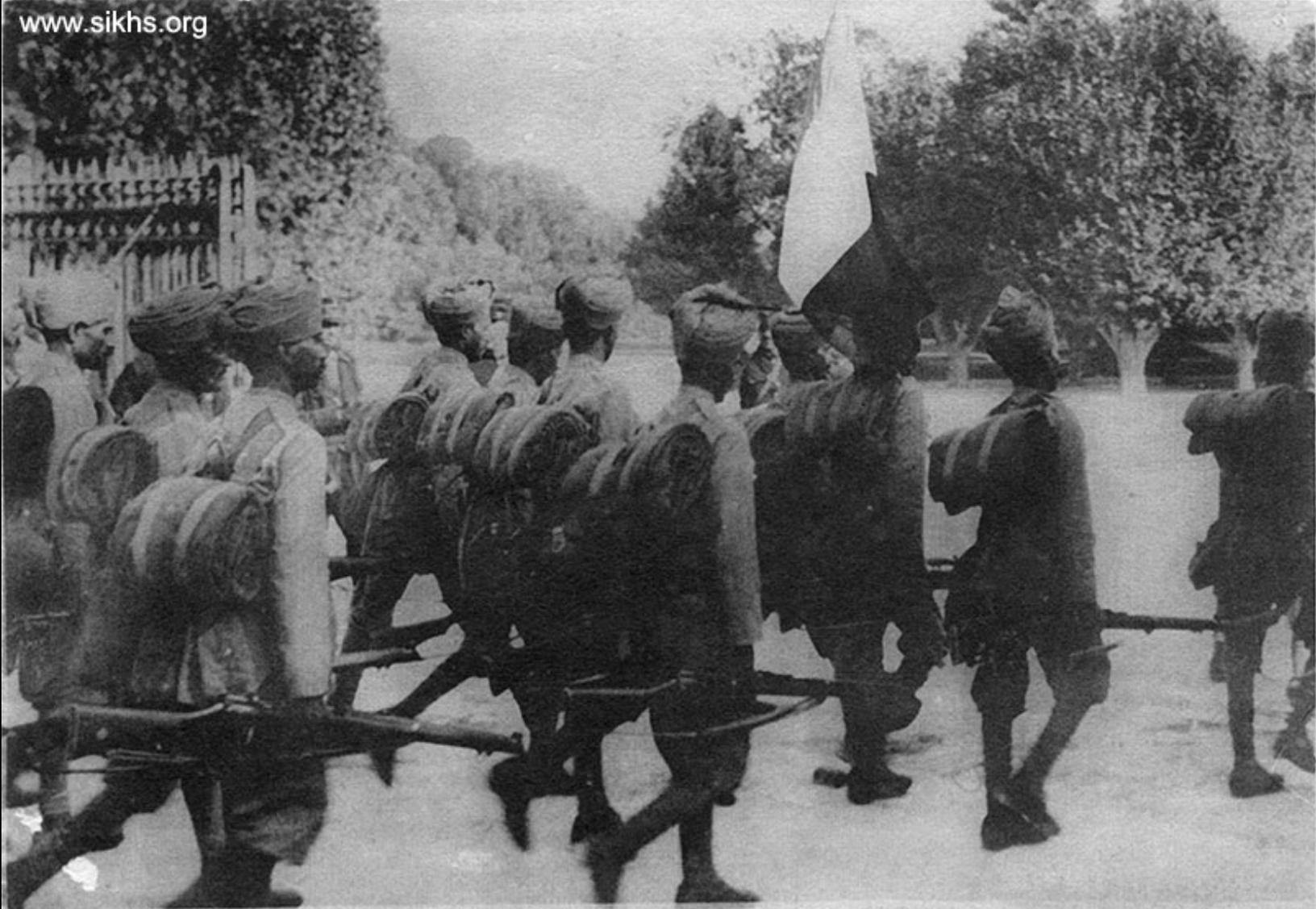
Soldats Hindous fraternisant avec un petit Français. — L. R.





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1914...

↑ 11... Serie

Infanterie Indienne arborant le

drapeau tricolore

Indian Infantry putting up the

tri colored flag



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Départ de soldats hindous pour le front. — Indian soldiers starting for the front.



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YPERN



ERRACHE 1914

L'ILLUSTRATION

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VISIONS D'ORIENT DANS LE NORD DE LA FRANCE. — Indiens Sikhs au cantonnement (Février 1915).

# With the INDIAN TROOPS in FRANCE : *Pages from an Officer's Sketch Book.*



*Corporal Naick Mahan Singh*

**T**HE capabilities of our Indian troops are by this time well known both to us and to the Germans. Since their arrival in France they have constantly been in the thick of the fighting, and have well stood their ground, although severely tried by the cold. It was at first predicted that Indian troops could never stand up to the French climate, but it was pointed out that many of them were used to chilly work on the Indian hills. The Indian troops in the trenches do, of course, feel the change in weather conditions, and feel it very acutely; to keep as warm as possible the men have made little dug-outs, in which to lie



*The 15th Sikhs*





- **General Jean Francois Allard (1785-1839) and His Family in the Sikh Kingdom of Lahore**
- Painted in Lahore, 1838
- General Allard was born in St. Tropez in 1785 and enlisted at 18 in Napoleon's 23rd Dragoons of the Line. He joined Napoleon during the One Hundred Days, and was a captain of the Cuirassiers at Waterloo. After the emperor's downfall, he was considered so ardent a Bonapartist that he received no pension. Still eager for a military career, he went to Teheran and finally to Kandahar before eventually arriving in the Sikh kingdom of Lahore on March 23, 1822.
- He was hired by Maharajah Ranjit Singh to train two regiments, one of dragoons, the other of lancers in the Sikh army. When his men proved themselves in battle against the Afghans, Maharajah Ranjit Singh enlarged Allard's troops to four regiments, totaling 3,000 men. In addition he was soon assigned 2,000 of artillery. Never forgetful of France, General Allard's troops, the "Francese Campo," flew Lafayette's flag in the Khalsa army of Ranjit Singh.
- The painting shows General Allard with his native wife and children and servants at tea time in front of their great house at Anarkali, a suburb of Lahore. General Allard has a great and illustrious military career commanding his Sikh troops and was well regarded by them as well as the Maharaja. He briefly returned to France between 1834 to 1836 before returning to Lahore and resuming his military command where he eventually died of natural causes in January, 1839.
- The portrait not only celebrates the General's beloved native Punjabi family but also his dual allegiance to France and Punjab and it's two greatest leaders, for hanging round his neck in the painting is Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Bright Star of Punjab, the highest military medal of the Sikh kingdom and above that the Legion of Honour bestowed by Napoleon Bonaparte.

VERS LA VICTOIRE



Aug 552

HONNEUR aux ALLIÉS  
HONNEUR aux SOLDATS d'AFRIQUE et des INDES



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LES ALLIÉS

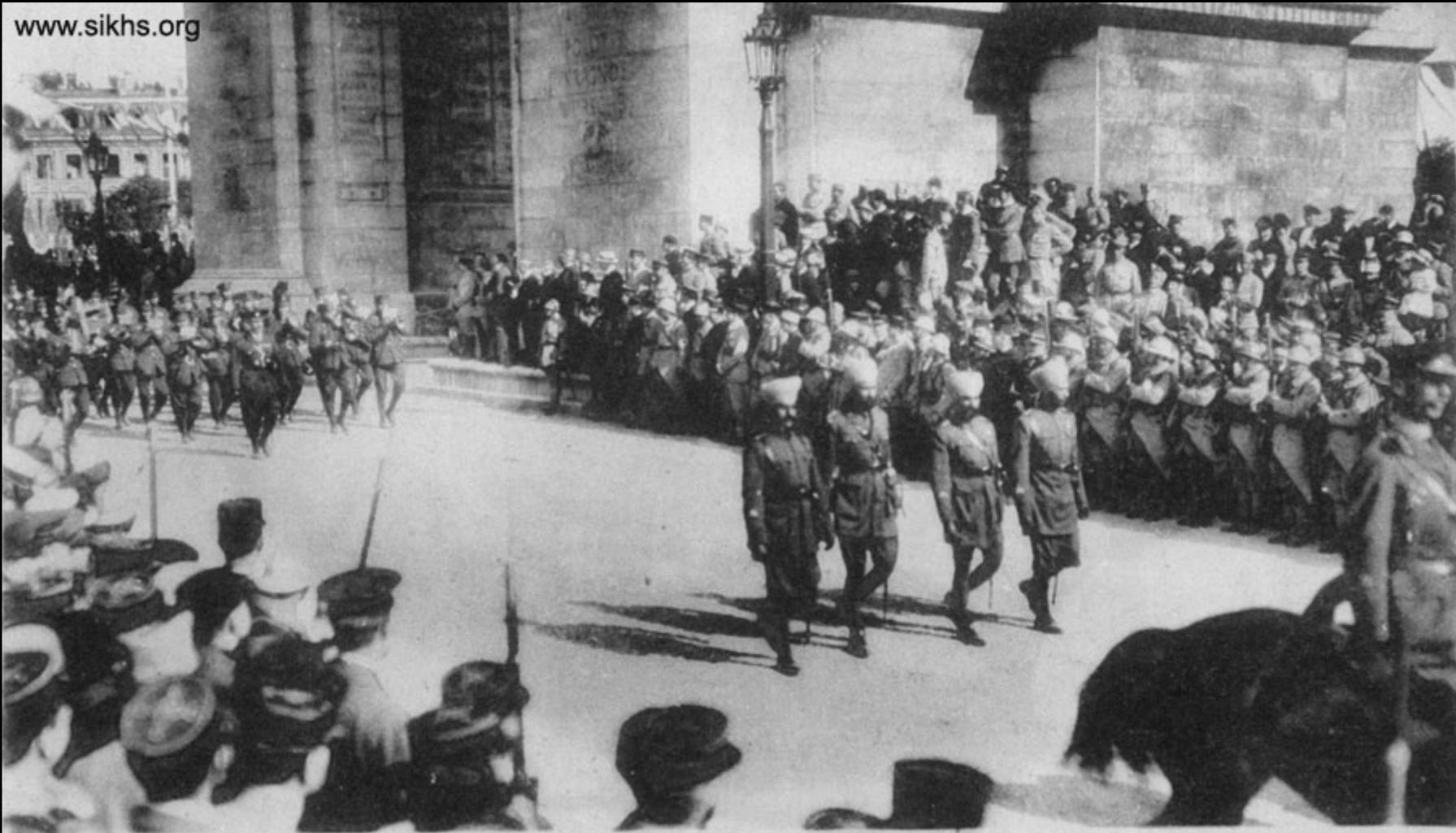


L'INDE MYSTÉRIEUSE  
est aux côtés de la loyale Angleterre  
pour la défense de la civilisation.



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# Acknowledgements



The British Library



Imperial War Museum



MG Trust



T P's Journal of Great Deeds Of The Great War



Parmjit Singh



Sandeep Singh Brar (sikhs.org)



Hardit Singh's Family