

What do the stories of the 'often forgotten armies' reveal about the Western Front?

It is October 1914. **Ganga Singh**, of the 57th Rifles, crouches in a muddy ditch. Despite his awkward position, he feels comfortable in his thin tropical uniform. Looking up, he can see blue skies and green leaves.

Singh is quiet and watchful. His makeshift trench is within the range of German guns. There is no barbed wire to stop attackers. The Germans facing Singh have both **artillery** support and hand grenades. Singh's regiment, meanwhile, has just two machine guns, and no grenades. Instead, Singh holds a jam jar filled with dynamite.

Singh looks around at the other men: a fragment of his **battalion**. The Indian army has been thrown hurriedly into battle to patch holes in British lines. Where are his friends? Who is the man at the other end of the ditch, shouting orders in an **unintelligible** language? Singh feels a sense of dislocation, of isolation, of loss.

Singh shoulders his new Mark III rifle which feels heavy in his arms. The new sighting system will take time to master. Singh's regiment is desperately outnumbered. If the Germans capture the ridge he is holding, they will probably also capture the Channel ports: an unthinkable disaster. Singh tries to remain calm. How had he got here?

He remembers the ship that set him down just a few weeks ago. He remembers a long journey across **the black waters** of the deep oceans. He remembers cigarettes placed in his hands as he arrived. He remembers flowers pinned to his tunic. He remembers sitting cross-legged on the grass with the rest of his regiment. He thinks he is **somewhere near Paris, or did the officer say Persia?** It's hard to know.

Singh is a **veteran**. He has experience. He is part of the largest volunteer army in the world. The **Battle of Mons** had showed the British how strong the German force was. The British now need the Indian Army to plug gaps in the front lines. Singh has been brought into the eye of the storm.

The shelling is continuous. Hour by hour, the ancient town of **Ypres** is being pounded into rubble. Singh carefully puts down his jar. He has heard the sound of enemy approach. He picks up the bayonet. He shoots.

One, two, three, four, five. Five German soldiers are killed. The bayonet breaks in two. Ignoring the jar, he picks up a sword. He fights on until he collapses, wounded.

He is later found alive when the Germans are gone. The trenches he had so **ferociously** defended are successfully re-taken by the 5th Dragoon Guards.



Singh survived the First Battle of Ypres, and the British lines held – but only just. After an unseasonably warm Autumn, the winter of 1914-15 was very harsh. Men stood for days in freezing mud. It was this winter that brought the terms 'trench foot' and 'shell shock' into common use.

By the end of 1914, the Indian Corps held 10 miles of the 25-mile British sector in Northern France.