

## Seasickness, Sharks and Unknown Lands: Files Released Online Allow People to Engage With Indian Troops' Experiences of First World War

**EMBARGOED UNTIL Thursday 25 September 2014, London, 00:01 GMT** – Today The National Archives is making 171 First World War diaries of the Indian Infantry units deployed to the Western Front available online to download via its [First World War 100](#) portal and tag on [Operation War Diary](#), the online crowdsourcing project.

These diaries cover the entire period of the units' involvement in the war, including their journey by sea from India and the reception they received on arrival in Marseilles, with the first two brigades docking on 26 September 1914. Highlights include accounts of:

- Their long journey across the seas to what was an unknown destination at the time (Ref: WO 95/3926 - entry dated: 30.08.14). Many men experienced seasickness and weather they had never encountered before. One diary even includes reports of a shark swimming around the ship on 1 September 1914 (Ref: WO 95/3920 entries dated 29.08.14 and 01.09.14).
- The "magnificent reception" they received from the French upon their arrival in Marseilles where crowds greeted them with fruit, coffee, biscuits, flags and flowers (Ref: WO 95/3926 date: 03.10.14).
- How their religious requirements were accommodated. One diary notes how Indian troops were allowed to go up to the Promenade deck of the ship to pray, facing east towards Mecca (Ref: WO 95/3920 entry dated 11.09.14).
- The enemy in the trenches trying to communicate with Indian Troops using a white screen inside their trench on 2 poles within inscription "Indian Soldiers. The Holy War has begun. Come and join us. Death to the Hated British." (Ref: WO 95/3948 date: 08.11.14)

**William Spencer, author and military records specialist at The National Archives said:** "These diaries provide fascinating insights into the mobilisation of Indian Troops and how they were accommodated as part of the allied forces that fought on the Western Front. Now they are online, people across the globe can engage with the real stories of those that fought in the war. The National Archives would like to invite people to get involved in *Operation War Diary* to tag the diaries to reveal the many stories still to be discovered."

Indian soldiers in the Indian Army came from the Lahore and Meerut Divisions and the Secunderbad Cavalry Brigade. In October, Indians were fed into some of the fiercest fighting at Ypres.

We are encouraging people to take part in *Operation War Diary* to help uncover all of the many stories contained within the 1.5million pages of the unit war diaries from France and Flanders. Volunteers wishing to take part in *Operation War Diary* can join the project here: [www.operationwardiary.org](http://www.operationwardiary.org).

**For media enquiries please contact Rebecca Simpson, Press Officer at The National Archives on 0208 392 5277 or by email: [press@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:press@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).**

**Notes to Editors:**

**Spokespeople available:**

**William Spencer** is Principal Military Specialist at The National Archives where he has worked since 1993. He served in the Royal Navy, including operational service in the Falklands in 1982, and holds an MA in War Studies from the prestigious Department of War Studies at King's College London. William is the author of the bestselling books *Medals: the Researcher's Guide*, *First World War Army Service Records*, *Air Force Records* and *Family History in the Wars*.

**More on the Unit War Diaries (file series WO 95)**

The National Archives has one of the largest First World War collections in the world. The diaries are the most popular records from The National Archives' First World War collection (file series WO 95) and the first in a series of First World War records to be digitised as part of The National Archives' centenary programme – [First World War 100](#) – which spans a five-year period from June 2014 to June 2019.

The unit war diaries are arranged by front, then by division, then by the units within each division. This digitisation will allow researchers around the world to access the diaries as never before. We plan to digitise more war diaries as part of our centenary programme.

**First World War 100 - The National Archives First World War Centenary Programme**

[First World War 100](#) - a new digital platform - has been created to guide people through the vast collection of historic records, letters, wills, maps, photographs, illustrations and artworks held by The National Archives. Adding content throughout the five year programme, [First World War 100](#) will be the central hub for the public to search and view official First World War records.

**About The National Archives:**

For the record, for good...The National Archives is a government department and an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). As the official archive of the UK government and England and Wales, we look after and make available to the public a collection of historical records dating back over 1,000 years, including records as diverse as Domesday Book and MI5 files. [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk) [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk)

**First World War Centenary Partnership, led by IWM**

The National Archives is a member of the First World War Centenary Partnership, established in 2010 and led by IWM. The First World War Centenary Partnership is a network of over 2,000 cultural and educational not-for-profit organisations from 37 countries, who are producing a collective programme of events, activities and resources from 2014 – 2018 to mark the centenary. [www.1914.org](http://www.1914.org)