

# Ganga Singh

History

Lesson 2 of an enquiry of 6 lessons

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



# Situation in August 1914

Things were not looking good for **the Allies**.

The German Army was moving very quickly through Belgium and the **British Expeditionary Force** had suffered many losses.

Indian troops of the British army were brought to the Western Front to help fight on the Allied side.



# **'Race to the Sea'**

1. German army raced through France and almost reached Paris.



2. French and British pushed the Germans back.



3. The two sides travelled north trying to outflank each other.



4. They got closer and closer to the sea.



## **First Battle of Ypres:** October- November 1914

Ypres was seen as very important. If the Germans won, they would be able to cut off the British from their supplies.



# Ganga Singh

- Was a Sikh from the Punjab, which was then part of British India
- He was an experienced soldier
- His **regiment** arrived in Marseilles (southern France) in late August 1914
- He fought in the First Battle of Ypres



# What does the story of Ganga Singh reveal about the Western Front?

Weapons and technology	Military <b>strategy</b>
Treatment of troops and life on the front line	The psychological effects of war



# The story of Ganga Singh

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.



# The story of Ganga Singh

Singh looks around at the other men: a fragment of his battalion. These Indian forces have 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? It's been a while since he saw an officer he knows.

Singh feels a sense of dislocation, of isolation, of loss.

Singh shouldered his new Mark III rifle which feels heavy in his arms. The new sighting system will take time to master.



# The story of Ganga Singh

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.



# The story of Ganga Singh

He thinks he is near Paris, or did the officer say Persia?

It's hard to know.

Singh is a veteran. He has experience. He is part of what will later become the largest volunteer army in the world. The Battle of Mons had showed the British how strong the German force was. The British now needed Indian troops 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 and men fall to the ground.



# The story of Ganga Singh

Singh carefully puts down his jar. He has heard the sound of enemy approach. He picks up the **bayonet**.

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.



# The story of Ganga Singh

*Singh survived the First Battle of Ypres, and the British lines held – but only just. He was awarded the Indian Order of Merit for his actions.*

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

*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.*



# Questions

1. Where did Ganga Singh come from?
2. Why was he brought to fight at Ypres?
3. What weapons did Ganga Singh have?
4. What did he do during the battle?
5. What happened to him after the battle?



# What does Ganga Singh's story reveal about the Western Front?

Use the sentence starters below to write a paragraph answering this question.

Sentence starters	Key words
The traditional presentation of the Western Front is...	<b>plug gaps</b>
Ganga Singh... (give a summary of his story)	trench
What this reveals to us about the Western Front is...	<b>bayonet</b>
	Indian Order of Merit



# Glossary

**The Allies** - those fighting against the Germans (French, British, Russian etc)

**Bayonet**- sword that is often attached to the end of a rifle (gun)

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**British Expeditionary Force** - Britain's professional army

**Dislocation** - being out of place

**Regiment** - army term for a big group of soldiers

**Strategy** -plan of action

