

True Face of the Sikhs

Please don't let it get tarnished

Desert Diwan

Sikh soldiers marching with their holy Book, the Guru Granth Sahib, for a religious service in the desert during the Mesopotamia campaign in World War I. The Guru Granth Sahib played a central role in the life of a Sikh soldier in the British Army. A raw Sikh recruit could only be admitted into the army after being baptised into the Sikh Khalsa and taking the oath on the Granth Sahib. In daily life, as is seen here the holy Book would lead the troops in their religious activities and also lead the troops in battle. Throughout the soldier's life, the Guru Granth Sahib acted as Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer.



I have seen only two races in the world who really like fighting, the Sikhs and the Gurkhas. In peace-time the Sikhs are difficult men to command : but put them in a hot corner, and they live up to their title of Singh, which means lion. In Mesopotamia in the last war the Arabs called them Black Lions. Martial India, F. Yeats-Brown, 1945.

From the founding days of their faith, Sikhs have been enjoined by their Gurus to confront social injustice as an integral part of their spiritual expression and advancement.

The reputation of the Sikh soldier as one of the world's finest has its origins in the creation of the Khalsa in 1699 by Guru Gobind Singh. Three hundred years ago Guru Gobind Singh's dramatic founding of the Khalsa was attended by tens of thousands of Punjabi farmers, traders, artisans, 'untouchables', and trained warriors who became the brothers and sisters of an unprecedented people's army of India.

The original Khalsa initiates were never belly-soldiers or mercenaries; soldiering was part of their spiritual make-up as defenders of religious freedom "for all faiths" (Ninth Guru of Sikhs Guru Teg Bahadur Sahib gave his life to protect the Hindus from the tyrant regime) of Mughals in India at a time when the Moghal rulers were engaging in forcible and brutal conversions. What the Guru succeeded in doing was to convert the Sikhs from humble peasantry of the Punjab into some of the greatest and most noble warriors in world history.

These images depict the centuries-old partnership between the British and the Sikhs, and photographs documenting the relatively unheralded role of Sikh soldiers during the two World Wars.

The images and quotes have been selected to show the generations of Sikhs who have sacrificed so much, including their lives, in virtually every field of battle.



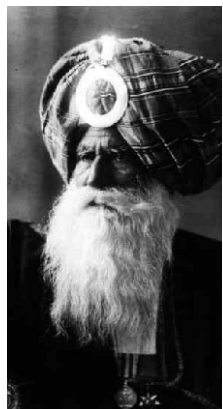
Sikh Soldier of the 11th Sikh Regiment with a captured Nazi flag in Italy at the end of the Second World War

A remarkable people, the Sikhs, with their Ten Prophets, five distinguishing marks, and their baptismal rite of water stirred with steel; a people who have made history, and will make it again. Martial India, F. Yeats-Brown, 1945.

H e r o i s m U n p a r a l l e l e d

Major Coke saw the old man standing in the road with two swords on. He begged to be taken back into the service, and when Coke demurred, he said: "What! my old corps going to fight at Delhi without me! I hope you will let me lead my old Sikh company into action again. I will break these two swords in your cause." Coke acceded to the old man's wish, and throughout the siege of Delhi he displayed the most splendid courage. At the great attack on the "Sammy House"..., Ruttan Sing, amidst a shower of bullets, jumped on to the parapet and shouted to the enemy, who were storming the piquet: "If any man wants to fight, let him come here, and not stand firing like a coward! I am Ruttan Sing, of Patiala." He then sprang down among the enemy, followed by the men of his company, and drove them off with heavy loss."

Amongst the Native officers killed during the Mutiny against British rule - 1857) was Subedar Ruttan Sing Isic! ... He was a Patiala Sikh, and had been invalidated from the service. As the 1st Punjab Infantry neared Delhi,



Sikh mistaken for Muslim, shot

Prabhjot Singh
Tribune News Service

Chandigarh, September 15

"All those who wear turbans and sport beards are not Muslims. Please do not mistake Sikhs for Muslims and victimise them for the terrible tragedy that took place in Manhattan and Washington DC on September 11," is the appeal from various North America-based Sikh organisations to their American counterparts following reports of a Sikh, mistaken for a Muslim, being shot dead in New York city yesterday.

Though the Indian Government has taken up with the Bush Administration the issue of safety and security of Indians in general and Sikhs in particular living in the USA, yet various Sikh organisations have issued appeals besides circulating details about the history, culture and features that distinguish Sikhs from Muslims to the media, both print and electronic, besides the police and intelligence agencies in the USA.

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WE FOUGHT ALONG WITH AUSSIE SOLDIERS AND DIED IN GALLIPOLI.

Sikhs in the trenches of Gallipoli in 1914. The allies suffered very high casualties in this major battle of World War I. Sikhs in Flander in 1916, another famous battleground which inspired the famous poem 'Flanders Fields'.

Authenticated by an Aussie World War One Veteran



A photograph from October 1914 shows a wounded Sikh soldier being loaded into an ambulance in France.