# The British Empire

The war involved people from all over the world.

Great Britain, Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary all ruled empires. Their colonies sent supplies, food and soldiers to help in the war effort.
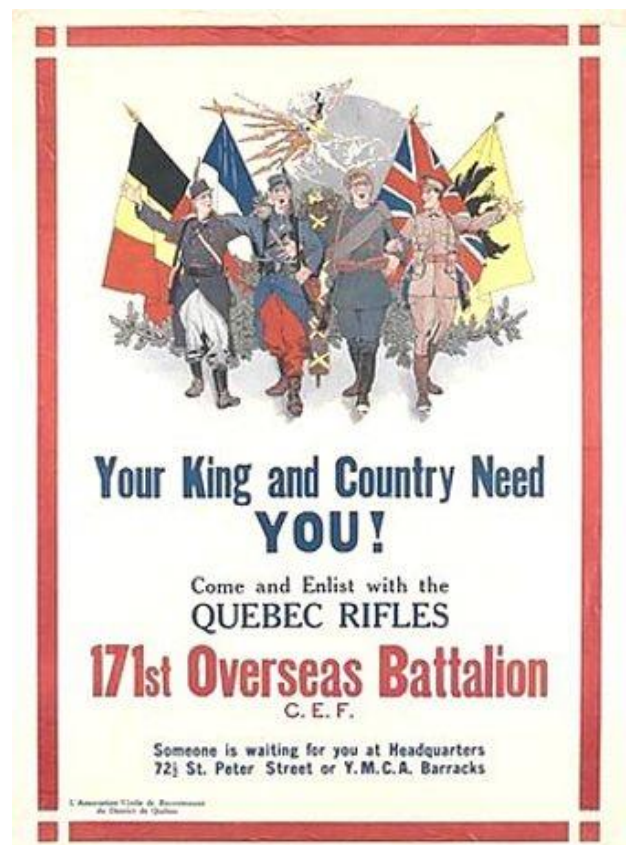
## The British Empire

Britain's colonies sent over two and a half million men to fight for Britain during the war.

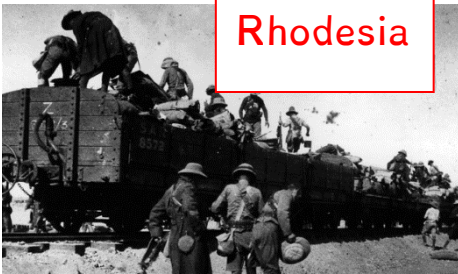India sent the most soldiers. At that time, India included both Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Colonies as far away as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Rhodesia (which is now Zimbabwe) also sent thousands of soldiers.

That meant that Britain had soldiers from five different continents:

Europe, North America, Australasia, Asia and Africa.



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QUEBEC RIFLES
171st Overseas Battalion
C. E. F.
Someone is waiting for you at Headquarters
72½ St. Peter Street or Y.M.C.A. Barracks

## Which countries sent soldiers to fight for the British Empire?

Rhodesia
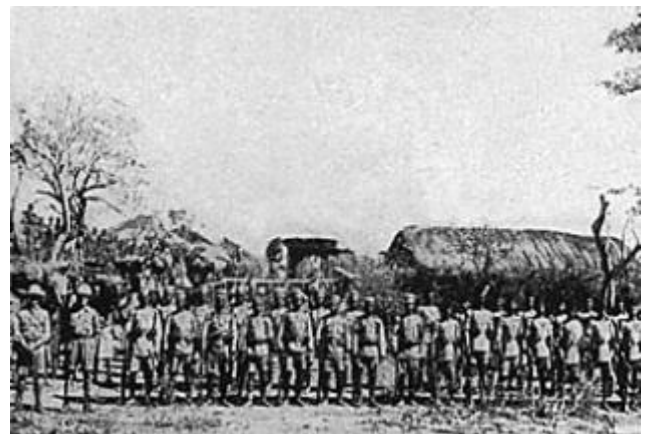
Australia and New Zealand

Canada

South Africa

India

## Independence

The colonies fought hard to help Britain in the war. However, this prompted them to question if they deserved a chance to rule themselves with their own governments.

Britain saw how much these colonies helped during the war and decided that some could be given more freedom once the war ended.

This was a step towards some countries gaining independence.

## The Royal Family

The British Empire was ruled by the Royal Family.

During the war, the Royal Family changed its surname from 'Saxe-Coburg-Gotha' to 'Windsor', which sounded more British.

Other British royals played a part in the war:

- **Princess Mary** worked as a nurse. For Christmas 1914, she helped arrange for a tin containing tobacco or sweets to be sent to every man in the armed forces.
- **Edward, Prince of Wales** (later King Edward VIII) served in France as a Staff Officer. He was awarded the Military Cross and in 1918 learned to fly. But he was banned from combat in case he was captured by the German Army.
- **Prince Albert** (later King George VI) served in the Navy and Army. He was not heir to the throne at the time so was allowed to take part in combat.



Official portraits of Queen Mary and King George V in 1914.

Many people across the Empire looked to the Royal Family, especially King George V, to inspire them and help them to understand why they were fighting.

## How many soldiers from the British Empire served?

From 'The Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War 1914–1920':



- Britain: 5,000,000
- India: 1,440,437
- Canada: 628,964
- Australia: 412,953
- South Africa: 136,070
- New Zealand: 128,825
- Other colonies: 134,837

Even though most of the fighting happened in Europe, it is clear to see the impact of the war on people all over the world.