

The West Indian Soldier: The British Army and Caribbean

Education Pack

This education pack is designed to teach you about the way in which the British Army helped to shape the identity and history of the nations of the Caribbean (also known as the West Indies), as well as the servicemen and women of those nations in the British Army. The Caribbean is home to a diverse array of people, who can trace their origins to all over the world and, as a result, has developed its own unique **Creole** society. Look for the meaning and explanation of orange words in the Glossary.



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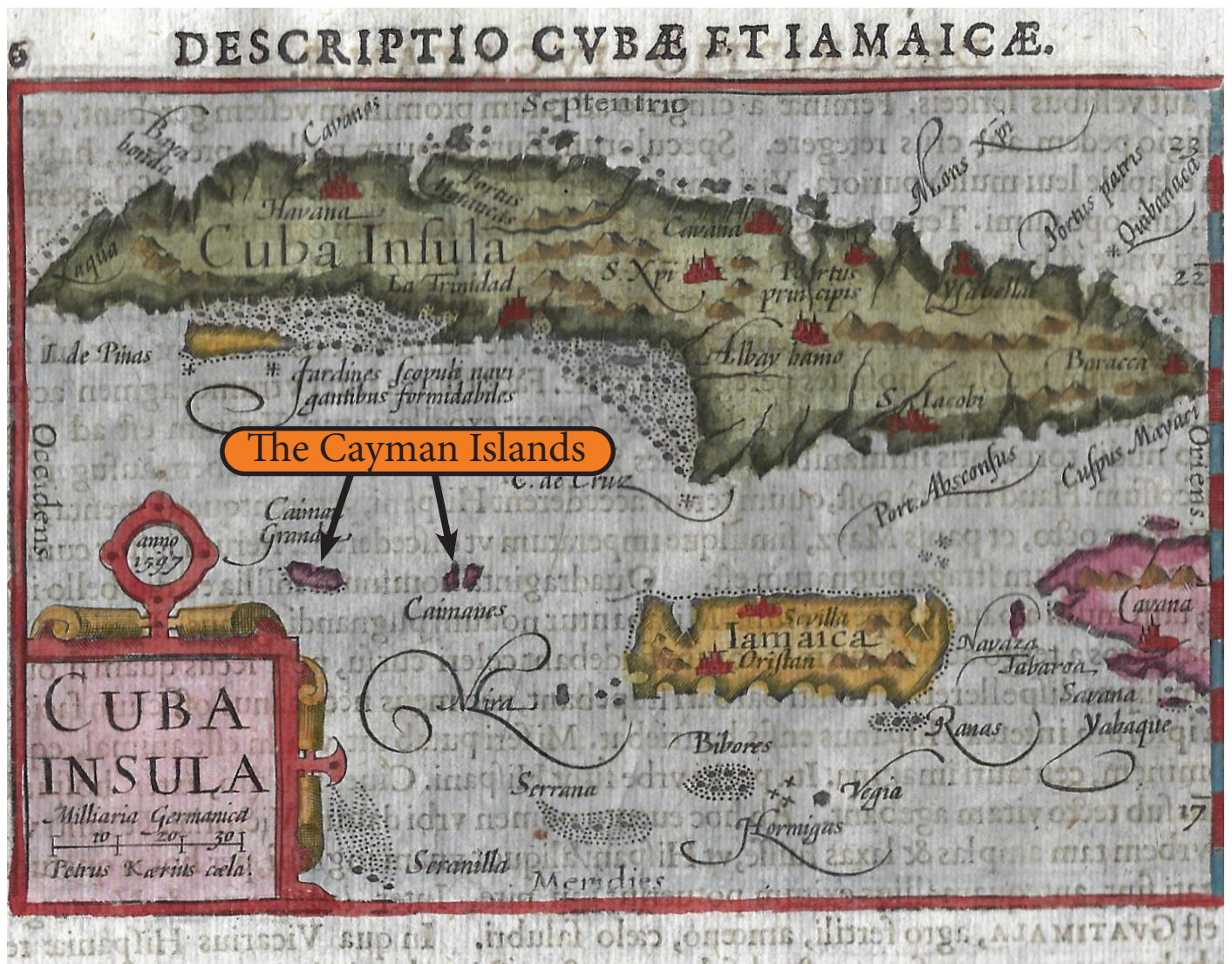
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Soldiers to Colonists

Soldiers from the British Army were some of the earliest European colonists in the region and today many West Indians of all races are descended from them. In 1654, an army was sent by Oliver Cromwell to the Caribbean to challenge the power of the Spanish who ruled much of the Americas. This became known as the 'Western Design'. This army succeeded in capturing the island of Jamaica and most of the soldiers were left there to become settlers. Some of these soldiers also spread to other islands. Some were granted plots of land where they settled, such as the first of the Websters of Anguilla. Two men, Watler and Bodden, acted on their own initiative and chose to become the first permanent settlers of the Cayman Islands. Many soldiers who served in the Caribbean over the next few centuries would also choose to settle in the region.



Oliver Cromwell



Soldiering in the Caribbean

Service in the West Indies was not easy for British troops as they had to deal with a very unfamiliar climate. They had to serve in a very hot and humid, unfamiliar environment, usually in a uniform that was designed for colder European temperatures. There were also many diseases in the region, the most feared of which was 'fever', of various kinds. In an age when medicine was not as advanced as it is today, such diseases frequently proved fatal, carrying off both officers and men alike. Nor were the wives and children of soldiers, who frequently accompanied their husbands and fathers to the region, safe from the ravages of disease. With such high rates of fatal illness, the Caribbean developed a bad reputation and many soldiers were afraid of being sent to the region. There are many graveyards throughout the Caribbean Sea where soldiers who did not return to Britain are buried, some with their similarly unlucky families.

Nevertheless, almost every regiment in the British Army served in the West Indies for a period of time. The longest serving was the 38th Regiment of Foot, later the Staffordshire Regiment, who were stationed in the Leeward Islands between 1707-1764, which is the longest overseas posting in the entire history of the British Army.



A soldier of the 38th Regiment c.1742



The mountainous and wooded landscape of many Caribbean islands

Wars in the West Indies

In centuries gone by, the wars that were fought between the great powers of Europe were also fought in the Caribbean between their colonies in the region. The British, French, Spanish and the Dutch all fought each other for supremacy. Whilst many battles were fought at sea, they also sought to invade each other's colonies, as these were very valuable, and they sought to deny their enemy these profits, whilst enjoying them themselves. Over the course of almost three centuries, this involved many islands changing hands on multiple occasions, usually, but not always, being returned to the original nation during the peace talks at the end of the war. St. Lucia changed hands between the British and French 14 times over the space of 150 years!

Wars fought in the West Indies between the European powers include the Nine Years War (1688-1697), the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1713), the War of Jenkins' Ear and the War of the Austrian Succession (1739-1748), the Seven Years War (1756-1763), and the French Revolutionary Wars and the Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815).



The invasion of Martinique 1809

Fighting in the Caribbean

On the battlefields of 17th, 18th and 19th century Europe, battles were normally carried out in wide open spaces, which allowed infantry to form into long lines in order to fire their muskets at each other. The space also allowed for cavalry, soldiers on horseback, to move at speed and fight. The geography of the Caribbean, consisting of small, often mountainous and hilly islands, with dense jungles, meant that armies could not practise this sort of warfare in the West Indies. The mountainous, rocky terrain made it difficult for large numbers of soldiers and supplies to move around, whilst the dense jungle provided excellent cover for defenders, thus making it nearly impossible for cavalry to operate. Many British soldiers complained that they could not even see their enemy. This means that armies in the West Indies developed a fast-paced style of warfare, using lightly armed troops, **skirmishing** and often requiring close quarters fighting. The climate also meant that it was easier for soldiers to fight in the winter months rather than in the summer, the opposite season to warfare in Europe.



The 3rd West India Regiment attacking a bridge on Terre de Haut 1809
Image © National Army Museum, London

West Indians in the British Army

Whilst many British soldiers came to serve in the Caribbean, many West Indians also went to Europe to serve in the British Army. This often included members of the Caribbean's, largely white, upper class, who frequently purchased **commissions** as officers, but also many black and mixed race West Indians who contributed to Britain's growing West Indian community. In the eighteenth century, a stereotypical belief in the innate musicality of black people led to many regiments attempting to recruit black men, many of them West Indians, to serve in the regimental band. This was an important military role in the days before wireless communications, such as radio, as music allowed officers to direct their men in battle. For example, one tune meant that the men should attack, whilst another meant that they should retreat. It was dangerous work, as the importance of bandsmen meant that they were often targeted by the enemy. Such West Indian bandsmen served in some of the most prestigious regiments in the British Army, such as the Grenadier Guards. Some, also served in some of Britain's most important battles, e.g. Sergeant George Rose from Jamaica was at the Battle of Waterloo.



West Indian bandsmen at the Changing of the Guard
Image © National Army Museum, London

Contrary to popular belief, the first non-white officer in the British Army did not serve in the First World War, but instead as an army surgeon in West Africa. William Fergusson was born in Jamaica in 1795 to a Scottish Father and a black West Indian mother. After studying to become a surgeon in Edinburgh, he joined the Army at the age of 18 and was sent to Sierra Leone, where he served all his career, eventually becoming the Governor of the Colony in 1845.

The West India Regiments

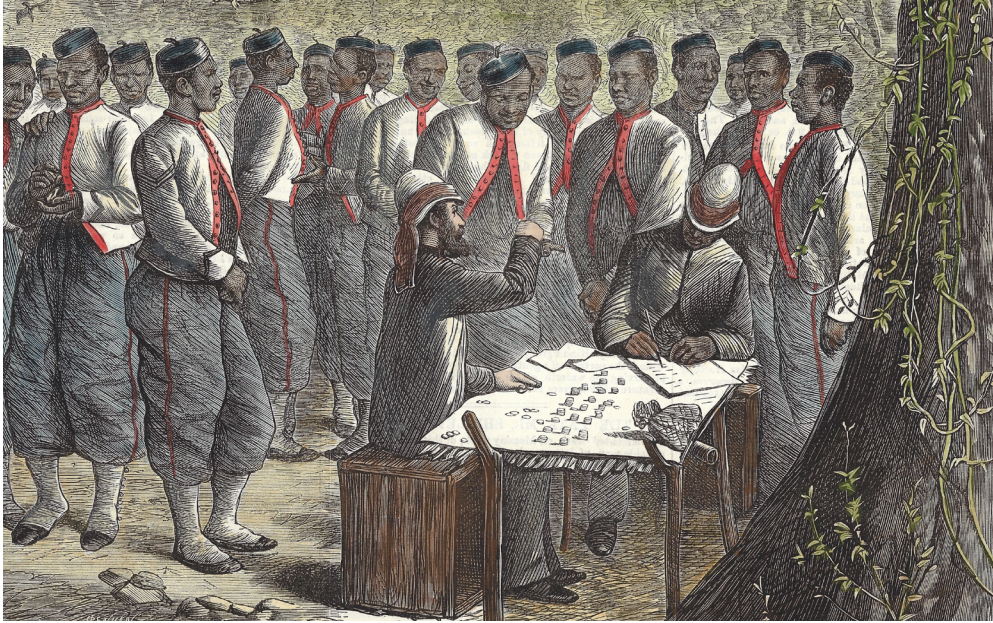
Given the high death toll that service in the Caribbean inflicted upon the troops, the Army wanted to explore other methods of garrisoning the region. They noted that West Indians themselves suffered less from the diseases that proved lethal to people from Europe and that the black population, in particular, was more resistant to the deadliest killer of all, 'fever'. Lieutenant General Sir John Vaughan proposed new regiments, ones that would be recruited from the largest body of black men in the region - slaves. Despite opposition from the leading citizens of the Caribbean, who were unhappy with the idea of arming slaves, in 1795 the West India Regiments came into existence. However, the **planters** largely refused to sell their slaves to the Army, and thus the Army had to purchase new slaves that had just arrived in the Caribbean from Africa. Although most of these new soldiers were purchased as slaves, free men, both black and white, chose to join the regiments.



A private of the
5th West India Regiment c.1800

Despite the fact that many men were purchased as slaves, they were not treated as slaves by the Army, but treated the same as white troops, including receiving the same pay, treatment in the same hospitals, the same rations of food and the same military discipline. The Army even arranged for some to receive care and a pension when they retired, something that was received by few white soldiers. The local governments of the Caribbean, uncomfortable with the idea of armed black men outside their control, tried to ensure that they were under the control of the local laws governing slaves, which the Army resisted. The question was: were these men legally slaves or free? The argument continued until 1807, when the British Parliament passed a law that explicitly declared them to be free men, shortly before the act that outlawed the Slave Trade.

Africa and the Caribbean



Paying a West India Regiment

The West India Regiments divided their time between Africa and the Caribbean over the course of the nineteenth century. In Africa, they **garrisoned** the British colonies at Sierra Leone, the Gambia and the Gold Coast and engaged in conflicts like the Ashanti Wars. In the Caribbean they also served as Garrison troops, protecting the West Indian colonies, but also aiding the local governments of the islands in matters of civil unrest and helping in the aftermath of natural disasters like the earthquake that struck Kingston, Jamaica in 1907. One instance stands out during their service in the Caribbean; on 1st September 1872, 38 men of the 1st West India Regiment successfully repelled an attack by 180 Ichaiche Maya at Orange Walk, British Guiana (modern day Belize) in a battle that lasted for 6 hours.



Soldiers on King Street, Jamaica, Kingston, 1907 after the earthquake

The First World War

Several thousand Caribbean servicemen of all ethnicities volunteered to serve in the First World War (1914-1918), with many paying their own way to travel from the Caribbean to Britain to enlist. The West India Regiments fought against the Germans in Africa, but the people and Governments of the Caribbean lobbied the British Government to create a new Caribbean combat regiment due to the number of West Indian men who wished to fight. The War Office did not want a new regiment but, with personal support from King George V, the British West Indies Regiment came into existence in 1915. During the course of the war over 15,000 men from every class, creed and colour of the West Indies volunteered to join the new regiment; these included Europeans, Africans, Chinese, Indians and **Caribs**. West Indians could thus be found fighting in almost every theatre of the war.



A West Indian soldier in Egypt

YOUNG MEN OF THE BAHAMAS

The British Empire is engaged in a Life and Death Struggle. Never in the History of England, never since the Misty Distant Past of 2,000 years ago, has our beloved Country been engaged in such a conflict as she is engaged in to-day.

To bring to nothing this mighty attack by an unscrupulous and well prepared foe, HIS MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY KING GEORGE has called on the men of his Empire, MEN OF EVERY CLASS, CREED AND COLOUR, to

COME FORWARD TO FIGHT

that the Empire may be saved and the foe may be well beaten.

This call is to YOU, young man; not your neighbour, not your brother, not your cousin, but just YOU.

SEVERAL HUNDREDS OF YOUR MATES HAVE COME UP, HAVE BEEN MEDICALLY EXAMINED AND HAVE BEEN PASSED AS "FIT."

What is the matter with YOU?

Put yourself right with your King; put yourself right with your fellowmen; put yourself right with yourself and your conscience.

ENLIST TO-DAY

A First World War Recruitment poster

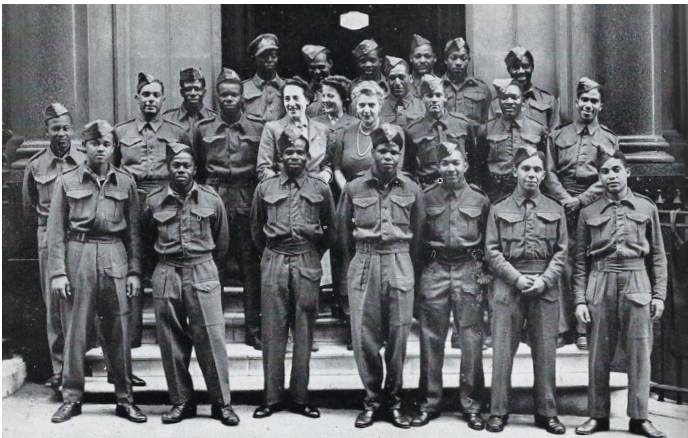
The British West Indies Regiment 1st, 2nd and 5th Battalions served in Egypt and Palestine against the **Ottoman Empire**, whilst others served in Europe, not as combatants, but as Labour Battalions, carrying ammunition and supplies. Even though they were technically infantry, the men took a certain pride in their work and referred to themselves as the *King George Steam Engine*. In one impressive instance, 60 men of the 6th British West Indies Regiment moved 375 tons in under 2 hours, more weight than 13 tanks of the time.



The badge of the British West Indies Regiment

The Second World War

During the Second World War (1939-1945), again there was a large number of volunteers from the West Indies. This time however, the majority of them served in the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy, rather than the Army. A new regiment, the Caribbean Regiment, was created in 1943, and went on to serve in Egypt and Italy. However, it never had the opportunity to fight the enemy. Many West Indian women volunteered to serve in the Auxiliary Territorial Service, coming to Britain to support the war effort in a variety of ways, including as clerks, drivers, radar operators and even as members of anti-aircraft gun crews.



Jamaican members of the Royal Engineers 1944



The Caribbean Regiment in Egypt



West Indian ATS volunteers
Noelle Thompson, Sonia Thompson, Alma La Badic
and Sally Lopez in Trafalgar Square



Private Ivy Belboda of Trinidad,
ATS Radio location operator in 1942



Jamaican and British Honduran ATS volunteers
in London 1944

Uniforms

A key part of any soldier's identity is the uniform. The traditional uniform of the British Army was the famous red coat. Each regiment could be distinguished from one another by the colour of facings on the jacket, as well as its lining. When the West India Regiments were first established, they wore the traditional red coat, firmly establishing them as a regular regiment of the British Army, as opposed to a colonial corps. In the 1850s the uniform was changed, with Queen Victoria's personal approval, to that worn by the French **Zouaves**. The colour of the tassels on the fez replaced the facings of the old uniform to distinguish the Regiments. The Zouave Uniform remains the best known of West Indian uniforms, and it is still worn by the military bands of both the Barbados and Jamaica Defence Forces.



A member of the Jamaica Military Band

The British West Indies Regiment largely wore the same Khaki as the rest of the British Army, but it was distinguished by their distinctive badge, which featured a wreath made of laurel, to represent victory, and a palm, to represent the Caribbean, with **Christopher Columbus's** ship, the *Santa Maria*, in the centre, also representing the Caribbean. The crest is a Tudor Crown, which they were given permission to use by King George V himself, reflecting the role he played in the creation of the Regiment.



The Victoria Cross

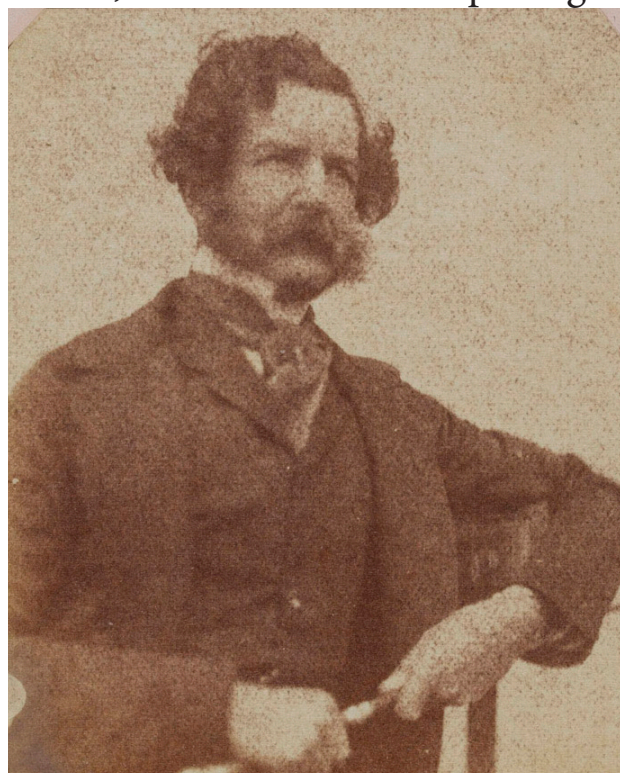
The Victoria Cross is the highest award for gallantry that can be awarded by the British Army, given to servicemen and women for the bravest acts. Several West Indians have been awarded the VC, some within ten years of the award's creation in 1856.

Henry Edward Jerome, born in Antigua. Whilst serving as a Captain in the 86th Regiment of Foot, on 3rd May 1858, he rescued a heavily wounded Lieutenant Sewell, with the aid of Private Byrne, at Jhasi, India and then bravely stormed the town. He then engaged with rebel forces, being severely wounded on 28th May.

Samuel Hodge, of Tortola, the British Virgin Islands was the second black man to win the award after William Hall, a Canadian serving in the Royal Navy. Serving in the 4th West India Regiment on 30th June 1866, he volunteered to break down the stockade at Tubabecolong with axes. Having affected a breach into the town, he entered with Colonel D'Arcy, his commanding officer, and succeeded in opening two barricaded gates from the inside, allowing



The Victoria Cross

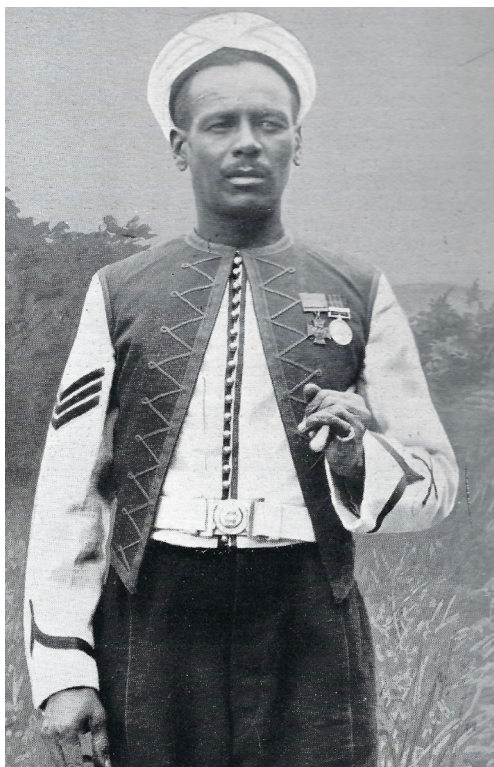


Captain Herbert Clogstoun
Image © National Army Museum, London

the rest of the British force to enter and secure the town.

Herbert Mackworth Clogstoun was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad. As a Captain in the 19th Madras native Infantry he demonstrated "*conspicuous bravery*" for charging rebels at Chichumbah, India, on the 15th January 1859, an act in which he was severely wounded.

William St. Lucian Chase was born in St. Lucia. Serving as a lieutenant in the Bombay Staff Corps in Afghanistan on 16th August 1880, he rescued a wounded soldier with the aid of Private Ashford, and carried him, under heavy enemy fire, to safety.



Sergeant William Gordon

William James Gordon, of Jamaica, as a Lance Corporal in the West India Regiment, put himself in harm's way to protect his superior, Major Madden, on 18th March 1892, which probably saved the Major's life. During an attack on the town of Toniataba, he threw himself between the Major and surprise enemy fire, pushing the Major out the way. He took a shot to his chest, which pierced his lungs. Gordon survived his wounds and later rose to the rank of Sergeant.

Frank Alexander de Pass was a member of a prominent Jamaican family. As a Lieutenant in the 34th Prince Albert Victor's Own Poona Horse, on 24th November 1914 at Festubert, France, he entered a German-held trench, destroyed a defensive fortification and rescued a wounded comrade whilst under heavy fire. He died the same day in an attempt to retake the same position, which had been re-occupied by the enemy. He was the first ever Jewish recipient of the Victoria Cross.



Lieut. Frank Alexander de Pass, V.C.



Johnson Beharry of Grenada, whilst serving as a Private in the Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment on 1st May 2004 in Iraq, successfully guided his damaged vehicle and five others out of danger following an enemy ambush, and then proceeded to rescue his wounded comrades from the vehicle, all the while exposed to heavy enemy fire. On 11th June, he was again ambushed whilst driving and was seriously wounded in the head by an enemy grenade but successfully drove the vehicle out of danger before losing consciousness.

Johnson Beharry
(Photograph by Russel Meiklejohn CC BY-SA 2.0)

The British Army and the Caribbean Today

West Indians from both the Caribbean and the diaspora in Britain continue to join the British Army today. The British Army also continues to work in the Caribbean, where they train, work with the local Defence Forces and provide relief after one of the natural disasters that frequently sweep through the Caribbean, such as **Hurricanes**. Many of the islands of the Caribbean have become independent from Britain since the end of the Second World War, and have established their own defence forces. These units are the successors of the West India Regiments and other defence units and continue many of the military traditions of the British Army. They also continue to use former British Army military sites, such as Up Park Camp in Jamaica and St. Ann's Fort and the Garrison area in Barbados.



The badge of the Jamaica Defence Force
Image © National Army Museum, London



The badge of the Turks and Caicos
Regiment

Two of the most recent regiments in the British Army have been formed in the Caribbean. The Turks & Caicos Regiment and the Cayman Regiment have been established in two of the fourteen **British Overseas Territories**. They are both **Reserve** regiments, composed of part-time volunteers, and are largely meant to provide support in the Caribbean in times of emergency or disaster, such as assisting in the aftermath of natural disasters, such as Hurricanes.

Activity

Quiz

- Q1.** Who was the first black West Indian Officer in the British Army?
- Q2.** By what nickname was the British West Indies Regiment known on the Western Front?
- Q3.** Soldiers Watler and Bodden were the first permanent settlers of which British Overseas Territory?
- Q4.** What year were the men of the West India Regiments declared to be free men?
- Q5.** Who was the first West Indian to be awarded the Victoria Cross?
- Q6.** In what country did the Battle of Orange Walk take place?
- Q7.** How many years were the 38th Regiment stationed in the Caribbean?
- Q8.** Which King supported the creation of the British West Indies Regiment?
- Q9.** What was the organisation that Caribbean Women volunteered to join in the Second World War?
- Q10.** What former British Army Base in Jamaica is still used by the Jamaica Defence Force?

Activity

Wordsearch

Q R N E B F K F Y Q V T Z F L O J N M D
 K D O J R C T L N B D H P Q I K T P S E
 X A S D N R E F J S H N W Y S G X W W P
 O J S C L O G S T O U N F M O N W O X A
 U A U R K M Y G A M B I A N P H W G I S
 E R W D R W P L A N T E R S A O B O P S
 U T N V T E T P U T S G P K Y H L R E L
 L L L R N L Q I I K U P F X B C V D Y F
 F D U O B L Q P D S R B P V H U J O R H
 H Z O U A V E G U O G A R R I S O N Z D
 N U N I S I W X V R E N A S A K H A K I
 B L H C H N M E I A O D W T P L C R Z Q
 E J O A A Z U V S N N S A A T F P M X K
 N T E R N M U R E G I M E N T D X Y J O
 R Y Z I T E L P F E V E R N L O D M E G
 P Y O B I V F S D W L N X S J P F N T P
 N U U S V A U G H A N G E F I U M N F O
 U O L Y J E R O O L S U Q O H N D B Y F
 N S R E B A Y X O K L U J R L O W I L O
 S U C W G I J J F J Y X E T P A L O N B

Army

Ashanti

Bandsmen

Caribs

Clogstoun

Cromwell

De Pass

Egypt

Fever

Gambia

Garrison

Gordon

Khaki

Orange Walk

Planters

Regiment

St Anns Fort

Surgeon

Vaughan

Zouave

Activity

Design your own Regimental Badge

A Regimental badge is used as a visual symbol of a regiment and as such will include images that represent things that define the regiment. For example, with the British West Indies Regiment, they used images of Christopher Columbus's ship and palm to show that the regiment came from the Caribbean.

Draw your own Regimental Badge, using images that define you, such as your favourite colour or your favourite animal.



Activity

Complete the sentence



The type of Uniform adopted by the West India Regiments in 1855 was originally worn by troops from North Africa.

..... changed hands on 14 occasions.



The British West Indies Regiment fought the Ottoman Empire in the

Many early West Indian soldiers served in the British Army as



..... Samuel Hodge was the first Black West Indian to be awarded the Victoria Cross.

..... George Rose served at the Battle of Waterloo.



Johnson Beharry was born in

The Turks & Caicos Regiment is a Regiment.

Use the following words to complete the sentences

Middle East

Private

Sergeant

French

Grenada

St. Lucia

Musicians

Reserve

Glossary

Army Reserve: A part of the British Army that is not composed of professional soldiers but part-time volunteers that are given military training for a period each year.

British Overseas Territory: A small nation that is linked to the United Kingdom through its history and constitution. Whilst they all recognise the British Monarch as their head of state, they largely govern themselves internally, whilst the UK is responsible for foreign relations and defence.

Caribs: A native people of the West Indies who occupied the region before Europeans first arrived and continue to do so today. The Caribbean Sea takes its name from them.

Christopher Columbus: An Italian explorer who, supported by the King and Queen of Spain, became the first European to discover the Caribbean in 1492, whilst trying to find a westward route from Europe to Asia.

Commission: In the Army, a commission is the appointment of a soldier as an officer.

Creole Society: A society that has developed from a fusion of different cultures, mainly European and African but also others.

Garrison: A group of soldiers stationed in one place to guard and defend it.

Hurricane: Powerful storms that form in the Atlantic Ocean. The windspeeds can reach several hundred miles an hour and can cause major damage and even loss of life.

Ottoman Empire: An Empire that formerly ruled much of the Middle East and parts of Europe between the 14th and early 20th centuries. Its capital was at Istanbul and its modern successor is Turkey.

Planters: At the head of the Plantocracy social structure in the Caribbean. The planters owned large estates worked by slaves, producing crops such as coffee and sugar.

Skirmishing: fighting for a short period of time between a small number of combatants.

Zouave: Soldiers in the French army that were originally recruited in north Africa in the then colony of Algeria, known for their distinctive style of dress.

A Timeline of the West Indian Soldier

1654-1655
The Western Design and the Conquest of Jamaica

1690
Brimstone Hill, St. Kitts used as a military site for the first time

1739-1748
The War of Jenkins' Ear

1744
Creation of a new Regiment, later 49th Foot, in Jamaica

1689-1697
The Nine Years War

1707
Colonel Luke Lillingston's Regiment, later the 38th Foot, arrives in the Caribbean

1741
The Siege of Cartagena

1756-1763
The Seven Years War



Brimstone Hill, St. Kitts
photo by David Stanley (CC BY 2.0)



Soldiers of the 2nd West India Regiment

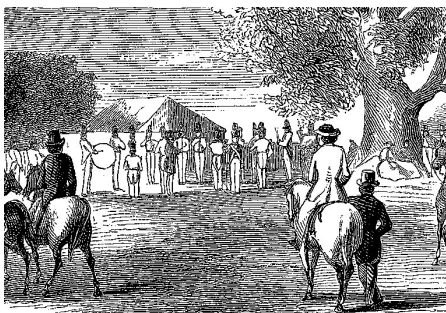
1813
William Fergusson receives his commission

1834
The Abolition of Slavery

1865
The Morant Bay Rebellion

1873-1874
The Third Ashanti War

1815
The Invasion of Guadeloupe after the Battle of Waterloo



1858
The West India Regiments adopt the Zouave Uniform
A West India Regiment band in Jamaica

1872
The defence of Orange Walk, Belize
A West India Regiment recruitment party 1898

1898-99
The Hut Tax War





The siege of Havana

1807

The soldiers of the West India Regiments are officially declared free men

men

1762
The siege and capture of Havana

1776-1782
The American Revolutionary War

1793-1815
The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars

1764

The 38th Foot leaves the Caribbean, ending the longest overseas posting in Army history

1781

The siege of Brimstone Hill

1795

The creation of the West India Regiments



Recruits from Trinidad in Britain 1915



Caribbean ATS recruits arrive in London 1943

1914-1918
The First World War

1927
The West India Regiment is disbanded

1943
The Caribbean Regiment is formed for the duration of the Second World War

2020
The Creation of the Cayman Islands and Turks and Caicos Regiments

1915
The British West Indies Regiment is formed for the duration of the war

A BWIR cap badge



1939-1945
The Second World War

1958
West India Regiment briefly resurrected as the armed forces of the West Indies Federation

A Barbadian trumpeter in Zouave uniform c.1960



This education pack has been produced by the West India Committee as part of *The West Indian Soldier*, a heritage project to raise awareness and educate about the historic and present relationship between the British Army and the Caribbean. The project has been generously supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

