

First Sikhs Remembrance Visit to the Monastir Road Indian Cemetery and Memorial in Salonika, Greece.

25th October 2012 , by Ranvir Singh Viridi

On Tuesday 16th October 2010 Sikhs from UK and Greece made the first remembrance visit to the Monastir Road Indian Cemetery in Salonika, Greece and paid respects to the soldiers who died during World War 1. Mr Martin Leiper, regional supervisor for Greece and the Balkans from Commonwealth War Graves Commission and his colleague Mr Peckrles, local supervisor was also present. Professor Niki Papageorgiou from University of Thessaloniki, Greece made the effort to be present at this historical event.

Nobody had officially visited this cemetery for remembrance since it was built in 1920. The Sikhs of Greece and professor Niki Papageorgiou were not aware of the existence of this cemetery. Efforts were made and access was gained by Mr Ranvir Singh Viridi and Mr Dal Singh Dhesy, members of the Royal British Legion, Birmingham and of Sikh Community and Youth Services, UK by liaising with Commonwealth War Graves Commission. After 92 years of closure this first historical visit was made by the British Sikhs in collaboration with the Sikhs from Shiri Guru Nanak Darbar, Tavros, Athens. The Sikhs from Athens were: Mr Jagpravash Singh (Victor) President, Rajbir Singh, Mangal Singh, Gurmej Singh, Jaswinder Singh, Harkirpal Singh and Gursharan Singh. Ardas (Sikh prayer) was done prior to entering the cemetery gate.



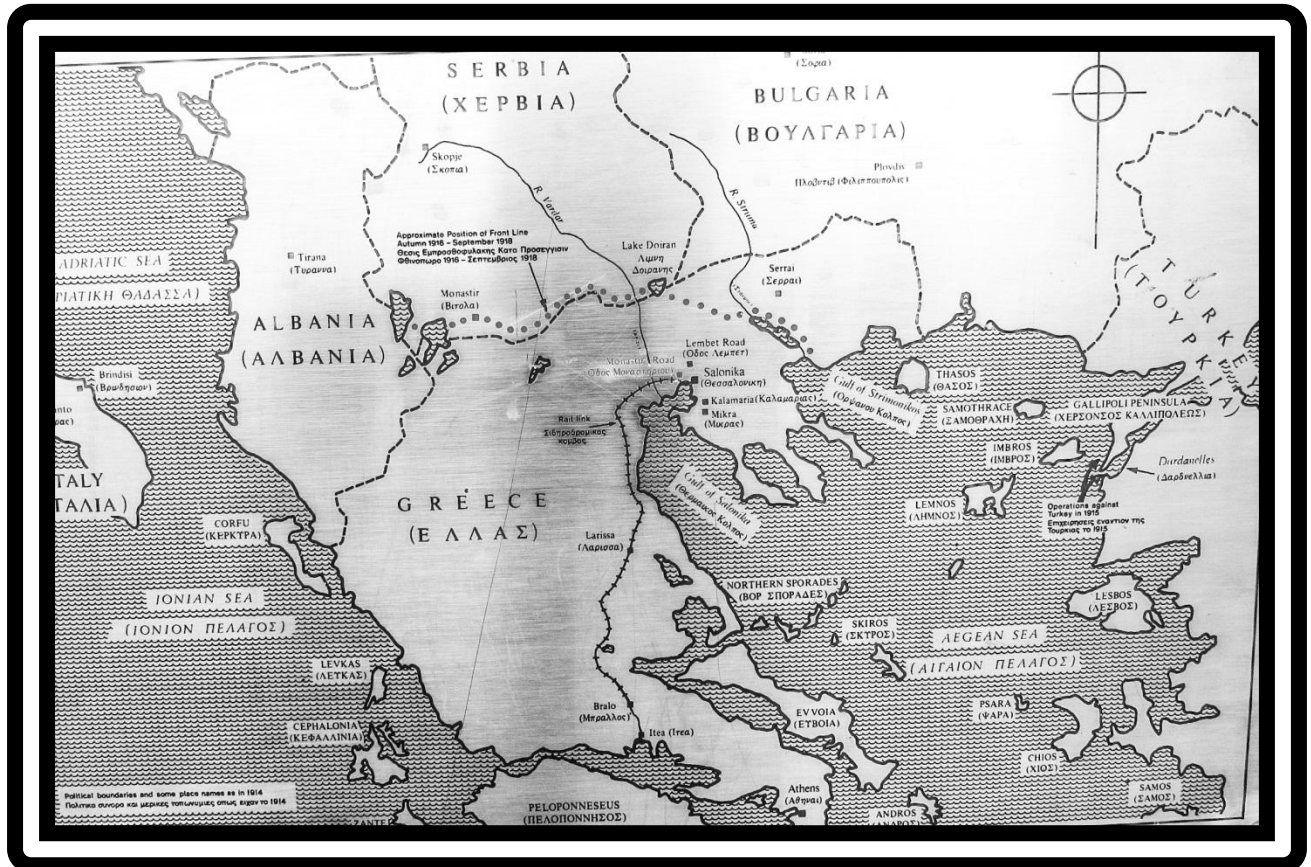
The Salonika Campaign 1915 – 1918

The Salonika Front was opened in 1915 to assist Serbia against the Central Powers – Germany, Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria. The British Salonika Force was one element in an Allied Army.

After the landing in October 1915 Allied forces pushed along the Vardar valley into Serbia but were then compelled to retire to Salonika which was held as a fortified camp for a year. An

Allied offensive in the second half of 1916 established a line running from Monastir to the Gulf of Strimonikos, the British Force holding the sector eastward from Doiran. This was to remain the Allied line until 15th September 1918 when the decisive break-out to the north led to the surrender of Bulgaria a fortnight later.

In the three years of its existence the British Salonika Force suffered 10,000 casualties, of which nearly half were due to the high incidence of malaria in this campaign.



Monastir Road Indian Cemetery and Memorial, Salonika.

The cemetery is 3 kilometres from the centre of Thessaloniki on the main road to Edessa. It is situated near a level crossing, next to the railroad lines and is well sign-posted. The name of the area is Dentrepotamos.

The cemetery is now kept locked and prior permission is required for visiting. It is well maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and was designed by Sir Robert Lorimer.

Salonika was the principal base of the Allied Army. Through the city, whether by sea or the overland route via Bralo, passed all reinforcements and supplies for the British Salonika Force whose Headquarters were in the suburb of Kalamaria; to it were evacuated the sick and wounded from the front. No fewer than 18 military hospitals were stationed in and around Salonika from which casualties were buried in three cemeteries : the British Section of the Allied Military Cemetery at Lembet Road, Mikra British Cemetery and Monastir Road Indian Cemetery.

Monastir Road Indian Cemetery contains the graves of 105 soldiers of the Indian Army and a memorial records the names of 220 of their comrades whose remains were cremated and 162 whose graves are unknown. 33 Indian seamen serving in the British Merchant Navy are buried or commemorated in the cemetery.

The cemetery was made between 1916 and 1920, and is made up of two plots - the southern plot, containing burials, and the northern plot, in which the remains of over 200 Indian servicemen were cremated in accordance with their faith. The men served mainly with the Royal Artillery, the Transport Corps of Bharatpur and Indore, the Mule Corps and, after 1918, certain Indian regiments.

There are now 358 Indian servicemen of World War 1 buried or commemorated in the cemetery. The northern plot contains a memorial with panels bearing the names of those who were cremated.



The cemetery also contains the Monastir Road Indian Memorial, bearing the names of over 160 Indian servicemen who died in Macedonia during the World War 1, whose graves could not be marked or moved. 220 names are written on the side of the octagonal structure.



66TH PUNJABIS
2223 SEPOY LAKH SINGH

76TH PUNJABIS
397 SEPOY RANDHIR

84TH PUNJABIS
3098 SEPOY MANCAL SINGH

2ND RAJPUT LIGHT INFANTRY
2372 LANCE NAIK RICHPAL SINGH
2846 SEPOY BHARAT SINGH
4386 NAWAB SINGH
4058 PIRBHU SINGH
3430 RAM SINGH

89TH PUNJABIS
2672 LANCE NAIK BANI SINGH
4073 SEPOY BHACWATI DIN UPADHYA
1561 DINDAYAL SINGH
4403 RUCHA SINGH

119TH INFANTRY
693 SEPOY BAMBALIAM

10TH JATS
1717 HAVILDAR RAMDIAL
2807 LANCE NAIK CHANDCI
4175 SEPOY HANWANTA
4683 HARAKE RAM
297 HIRA RAM
305 LAL CHAND
1966 PIRDEN

HERE FELL

ROYAL FIELD ARTILLERY
14399 HAVILDAR DARBARI
43427 LANCE NAIK NAND RAM
24808 RAJANAH
18467 DRIVER AMRUTHI HOSPREOT

19831 BABOO
35647 BABU RAM
PB19166 BABU SEBAR
21614 BAKHTI
PC18272 BHACO
50620 BHACWAN DIN
19895 BHODRA
14306 BISHAMBAR SINGH
32806 BRAMANI
19097 CHAIN SUKH
33984 CHANDCI
35355 CHOKEY
43951 DALDEO
44447 DARSHAN
35670 DEBI
PB19246 DHANA
42201 CANESH SINGH
18413 CANIA
44071 CHASI RAM
PB19800 COLU
19827 COPAL
29381 HARI SINGH
33997 HARI ALL
42898 HIRALAL

95TH RUSSELL'S INFANTRY
410 NAIK ARJAN SINGH
1085 SEPOY CHASSI RAM MSM
1057 KIAHEM SAHAI
771 MANJU RAM
4465 PATHIPAL
1328 RAMTI LAL

BURMA MILITARY POLICE
6480 SEPOY AMERSING CHETTRI

MULE CORPS
1605 DRIVER ARJAN
5426 ARJAN
1599 BALRAM
4456 DEBI
38016 DHANESAR SINGH
279 DICA SHANKAR
53 COVIND
259 KRISHNA NAIR
1088 MOBR SINGH
975 MOHH ZAMAN
6029 NUTHAO
323 RAMAPETER
973 RANNOD RAM

BHARATPUR TRANSPORT CORPS
839 LANCE DAFADAR SALLOM SINGH
1577 BLACKSMITH SAKHA
951 DRIVER BHANJAE
1014 CHANDAN
1644 CIRRAJ
1315 TUNOA

INDORE TRANSPORT CORPS
485 SADDLER MOTI
145 DRIVER HIRA SINGH
78 TUJA RAM

INDIAN SURVEY DETACHMENT
184 JEMADAR RAM CHARAN
KHALASI BICRAM SINGH

176 BOHDAN
179 CHAMMAN
161 CHUNKA
172 IPAN
167 MANCLOO
147 MINA
155 MOHAN
148 RUDAN
153 SHEKH BIBI
821 SOMAR
146 SOMAR

FOLLOWERS
41 COOK DUNCAL
19076 BHISTI / 1724
13566 SWEEPER P...
55 SYCE LALI DIN
3067 BHISTI KRI BHRA
38 SWEEPER LALU
10962 DHOBI LA SHIMTA
16767 SWEEPER MANNA
15092 NURHAN
15702 SAKTA
13738 SEWA
14699
12547 LANCER JRESH CHANDRA
14572 SWEEPER TONLEY

INDIAN MERCANTILE MARINE
158 KHALASI JIAN
1430 SEAMAN KOHAR SINGH



INDIAN LABOUR CORPS
7204 CARPENTER GANDA SINGH
4431 SURAJ BALI
4294 LABOURER ANUMI

5684 BAHWATI PERSHAD
4422 BHACWAN DIN
3250 DHARMA
2463 D PITAM
3431 D RAM DIN
2232 DURCA
3086 CANCIA KOLI
5442 CULAS
10553 HUSSAN
5635 JAI MAN
2988 KALIYA
2384 KHANSAHAI
5528 KISHU
5200 KUBER
5461 KUNARE
1588 LACHMI NARAIN
3108 MANSINGH
5068 MOHAN
5489 NANHOON
10253 RAM DIN
5255 RAM DIN
5332 RAM TAHAL
3109 SHB SINGH
5301 COOK MUNNA

ARMY BEARER CORPS
16838 BEARER AMBRAM MAKDR
331223 BAHADUR BIR
888587 BEHARI
771072 BENI RAM

ROYAL FIELD ARTILLERY
19730 DRIVER HIRNATHU
5066 HUSSIARU
41286 INDER
42577 ISHAR DAT PANDE
43608 JACARNATH
45094 JACESHAR
37429 JAI NARAIN
P.018252 JAWAR SINGH
14774 KABOOTAN
19813 KALI CHARAN
43312 KALOO
18425 KAMTA PERSHAD
491 KANSHI RAM
P.B.19490 KESAR SINGH
51685 KHANJAN
36560 KHANHIRJA
51635 KHURAN
P.C.18621 KISHAN LAL
45943 LAL BAHADUR
P.B.19316 LAXMAN
19852 MAMRAJ
15507 MANBODHAM
43417 MECHA
43876 MOHAN
21908 NANDO PILLAI
43638 NIRANJAN SINGH
3200365 NYWANT SINGH
P.B.19244 PARKU
P.B.19740 PEHARI
43489 PIARE LAL
P.T.18691 PUNIA
43573 PUNNO SINGH
43771 PACHHAR

ROYAL FIELD ARTILLERY
P.B.19653 DRIVER RAKH MATU
42731 DRIVER RAM AL TAR
31925 RAM LHANDAR
B.19305 RAM PATTAN
15140 RAM PERSHAD
P.B.19632 RUP,
41753 SAINA PAT
5702 SARUFA
21717 SHANKER
45790 SHEG CHARAN
15597 SHEG RATAN
21620 SHER SINGH
43637 SOMAI
15009 SUK KHAN

ROYAL CARRISON ARTILLERY
506 HAVILDAR MAJOR NATH
P.B.19497 DRIVER BALU NANDAN
465 DRIVER BARCAT SINGH

19 BASAWA SINGH
800 BHAN SINGH
39135 ERRAPPA
806 CANESHA SINGH
39144 COBIND
783 COPAL SINGH
3761 CUNWAT SINGH
35499 CURPAL
44088 JACANNATH SINGH
43827 KAMADHIN SINGH
44050 MANCAL
45442 MOTI LAL
745 MUNSHI RAM
32284 PAJESWAR
44241 SURMERA

4TH CURKHA RIFLES
1259 RIFLEMAN BACHATSIR CHARTE
4277 BALBAHADUR PANA
3803 CHUPAMANI FANI
4490 NARBIR BURA
4866 PARTA SINALE

6TH CURKHA RIFLES
4114 RIFLEMAN BHAWAN SINGH
2208 CHHALU SINGH
1596 KHALLA PHARIE
2273 MUHAR KITHARIE
2214 NARBIR RANA
3073 RAMBAHADUR
3168 SARAT DAHDUR
3741 SEPOY RAM SINGH 9TH BOPAL INF

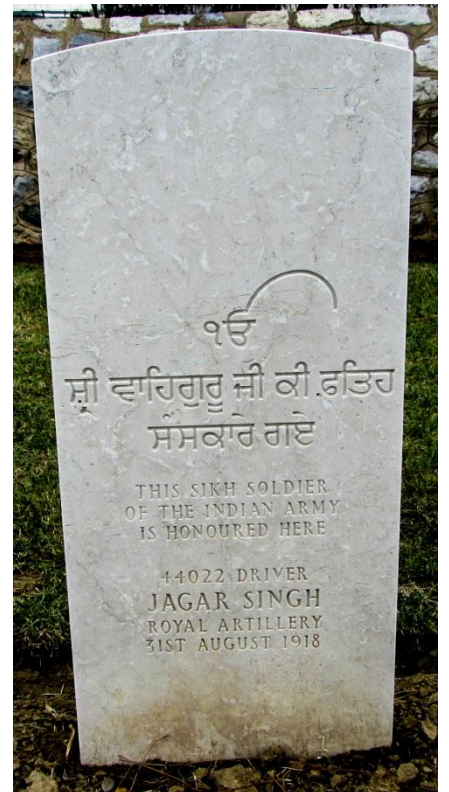
24TH PUNJABIS
1127 SEPOY MEWA SINGH
1949 NARAIN SINGH
2972 SUNDER

25TH PUNJABIS
3909 SEPOY BANTA SINGH

31ST PUNJABIS
286 SEPOY SANTA SINGH

39TH ROYAL CARWHAL RIFLES
1505 C.HAVILDAR KUTAL SINGH BHANDARI
2191 RIFLEMAN KUTTU SINGH
3365 SEPOY UDE SINGH BHANDARI

The Sikhs who died in Thessaloniki were mostly soldiers or drivers in the Punjabi units. There are three small white standing gravestones of Sikhs in the cemetery namely: Dhan Singh, Jagar Singh and Ganesh Singh. The individual gravestones have in white letters engraved on white marble the name, speciality, number and date of death as well as an inscription, for example in Punjabi: Ek On Kar Shri Wahe Guru Ji Ki Fateh (victory to the awesome Guru)



The respect with which the British buried them and maintain their graves is very moving. The ages of the dead are unknown. It has been recorded that the freedom of Macedonia from the Bulgarians was due to some Punjabi's.

In remembrance and to pay respect to those who made the ultimate sacrifice for Greece and Europe's freedom a wreath was laid by Ranvir Singh Viridi and Dal Singh Dhesy. Poppy Khanda's were placed at the gravestones of the Singh's.



Sardar Dal Singh Dhesy presented a Certificate of Appreciation to Mr Martin Leiper of Commonwealth War Graves Commission for their management of Sikh and Commonwealth War Graves. Mikra mobile team was also acknowledged for their continued work in maintaining the cemetery.



Remembering and honouring the fallen is the greatest tribute we can give to all those who gave their lives for our tomorrow. One wonders if they knew in which part of the world they were when they died. The Sikhs in Greece and elsewhere will continue to pay respect to the fallen at this cemetery in the future. It is hoped that this awareness will, in turn, improve community relations in Greece.

Who were these Sikhs and from where did they come from? The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has a website www.cwgc.org that makes the information available to those who are interested. It has a registry that mentions the name of each decedent, their rank, service number, date of death, age, regiment or unit in which he serviced, grave or memorial reference, place of origin and name of father or wife.

You tube video relating to the above event can be seen using the link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luFRvvn81E&feature=share&list=UUJx9tc4cqH0MCV-PGzRYQ8w>