

The West Indian Soldier: The British Army and Caribbean

Teachers' Pack

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From Soldiers to Colonists

- The Western Design is the name by which we know the attempt by the Commonwealth of England, led by Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell, to seize territory from the Spanish in the Caribbean.
- There are many arguments about what the motivation for this expedition was. There are three main theories and all three probably contribute to the overall motive:
 1. It was an attempt to break the control that the Spanish had on the Caribbean region so that the English could profit from it, as the Spanish had done.
 2. It was designed to protect English settlements and ships in the region, which were frequently attacked by the Spanish.
 3. There was a religious aspect to the expedition. England was Puritan Protestant and set against the Catholic Spanish.
- Remarkably for such a large undertaking, it was prepared with the utmost secrecy.
- The authorities wanted volunteers, but the call for men gave the commanders of Regiments in England the excuse to 'volunteer' men that they no longer wanted in their own companies. Such men were often poor fighters, ill-disciplined or badly trained.
- When the call for volunteers did not raise enough men, Press Gangs went to London to press men into service. London at the time was full of refugees that had been displaced by the long years of civil war that England had recently undergone.
- Even this did not raise enough men, so they had to recruit more men from England's earliest colonies when they reached the Caribbean.
- The fleet sailed from England in December 1654 with General Robert Venables in charge of the Army and General-at-Sea William Penn in charge of the ships.
- The fleet reached Barbados, then the most important of the English colonies in the Caribbean, in early 1655. They recruited more men from the indentured servants on Barbados and the other English colonies nearby.
- Cromwell had sent out many criminals and Cavalier prisoners from the English Civil War as indentured servants. Although, in theory, it was only for a limited term, the situation of such indentured servants was little different from slaves.
- Many indentured servants joined the Army, as they had been promised their freedom if they signed up.
- With finally sufficient men, the Army set out for their first target - Santo Domingo on the island of Hispaniola, arriving 14th April 1655.

- The attack on Hispaniola failed for a variety of reasons, including a lack of water, the need to march through an inhospitable landscape and the poor training and discipline amongst the soldiers.
- It was decided that Jamaica was an easier target, which proved largely correct. The Spanish surrendered not long after the English arrival on 10th May 1655 and abandoned the island.
- Even after Jamaica was conquered, matters were not easy for the Army. Disease was rife and there were not many supplies of food. Even though the Spanish had left, they had freed their slaves who attacked the English.
- The majority of the forces who had travelled to Jamaica were left there to become the first wave of settlers, with no chance to return home. Thousands died from a combination of starvation and disease in the first few months.
- In such a desperate situation many men deserted. According to tradition, this included Watler and Bodden, the first two settlers of the Cayman Islands. Some other soldiers were also given grants of land on other islands.

Soldiering in the Caribbean

- The British Army's traditional red coat was made from thick wool, not ideal for the hot and humid Caribbean climate, which meant that it adversely affected the health of those who wore it.
- The term 'fever' was used to cover what we now know to be a wide range of diseases, including yellow fever and malaria, rife because of the large number of mosquitoes that could be found in the Caribbean.
- The disease situation was worsened by a lack of medical knowledge at the time. The 'miasma' theory of disease was still prevalent and many doctors recommended methods of avoiding disease on that basis, such as lighting fires when camped near swampy areas or preferably to avoid such areas and the 'miasmas' they produced entirely.
- It is impossible to say how many soldiers died in the Caribbean over the course of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The toll was clearly huge. In a single year, the 32nd Regiment of Foot lost 32 officers and close to 1,000 other ranks on San Domingo alone.
- At the rate of death and ill soldiers rendered unfit for service between December 1799 and January 1803, the entire British garrison of the Windward and Leeward Islands Command would have needed replacing every six years.
- Many of those who did not die from disease were nevertheless so weakened by the experience, or from the effects of the climate, that they were discharged on medical grounds and transported back to Britain as invalids.
- The reputation of the Caribbean was so bad that many soldiers tried to avoid serving in the region through such methods as desertion. This was the case for 100 men of the Black Watch, who deserted in London after being marched all the way down from Scotland in 1743. They were captured in Northamptonshire and court martialled. All were sentenced to death, but only three were eventually executed.
- It was not unknown for the destination of a transport ship to be kept secret until after the voyage was underway to stop soldiers from rioting or deserting. Officers would often purchase a commission in another regiment to avoid going to the West Indies.
- Many soldiers and officers were accompanied by their families, who proved similarly vulnerable to disease. In 1819, during a fever epidemic in Jamaica amongst the 92nd Regiment of Foot, 4 out of the 5 officers' wives, 29 amongst the 60 wives of the rank and file and 33 of the 50 children died.
- The 38th Regiment first arrived in Antigua in 1707 as Colonel Luke Lillingston's Regiment of Foot. Their 57-year-long posting in the Caribbean is the longest in the history of the British Army.

Wars in the West Indies

- The wars fought in the Caribbean amongst the European powers almost always started in Europe and then spread to their Caribbean colonies.
- The exception to this is the War of Jenkins' Ear, which began in 1739 and later became part of the War of the Austrian Succession. It takes its name from a Captain Jenkins of the ship *Rebecca*, which was allegedly boarded by a Spanish vessel, claiming that Jenkins was trading illegally in Spanish territory.
- The value of the West Indian islands (producing major cash crops) made them important bargaining tools. The capture of such a valuable island denied the enemy the economic advantages of possessing it, whilst giving them to the victor.
- It was often the case that West Indian islands were used as bargaining chips in the eventually peace negotiations, and that opponents would be willing to make significant compromises in other parts of the world to ensure that they had the control of their West Indian colonies returned to them.
- A good example of this is at the end of the Seven Years War, when France was prepared to relinquish control of parts of India and Canada to the British for the return of Martinique and Guadeloupe, whilst the Spanish gave up Florida and Minorca for the return of Havana, Cuba.
- The value of the West Indian islands was such that, during the American Revolution, Britain diverted experienced troops and valuable resources from North America to try and ensure the safety of its Caribbean colonies from attack and invasion by the French and Spanish.
- St. Lucia changed hands over 14 times between the British and French over the period of 150 years, as it was a key strategic point in the Caribbean and gave its possessor a military advantage.
- For more information about the individual wars, please see the West India Committee's e-book available at <https://westindiacommittee.org/historyheritageculture/topics/the-west-indian-soldier/>

Fighting in the Caribbean

- Before the invention and widespread adoption of rifled weapons and more modern artillery, battles in Europe were large set piece affairs where opposing infantry were formed into long lines to shoot at each other with muskets.
- Obviously this only worked in large open spaces, which was not the case in the Caribbean, particularly in the interiors of many large islands, which were characterised by mountains and dense woodland.
- Many soldiers complained, when invading islands, that they never saw their enemies, whilst the latter were free to inflict injury upon them. This was because the often numerically inferior defenders were able to use the dense jungle terrain to their advantage, hiding their position whilst allowing them to attack without fear of reprisal.
- Thus combatants in the West Indies were forced to adopt skirmishing tactics, light sporadic combat in an open irregular formation, to fight, which proved to be much more effective in the terrain.
- The skirmishing tactics which proved so effective in the West Indies were developed in the American Revolution in North America. They were brought by the veteran commanders from these campaigns, such as Lieutenant General Sir Charles Grey, an experienced veteran of the Seven Years War and the American Revolution, who commanded the British forces in the Caribbean in the early years of the French Revolutionary Wars of the 1790s. These tactics were further refined for the Caribbean.
- Due to the poor and colder weather, in Europe armies did not traditionally campaign in Winter months, as being on the move in such conditions and sleeping in outdoor camps led to illnesses and fatalities. The wet weather also presented its own difficulties in ease of movement, both through the European countryside and on the battlefield.
- This was reversed in the Caribbean, when the rainy season occurs in the middle of the year, as did the powerful storms known as Hurricanes. The failure to appreciate this difference led to many European commanders being caught in difficult military situations.

West Indians in the British Army

- Several rich West Indians, from the upper class who owned the plantations, purchased commissions in the army before the practice was banned in 1871. Due to the racial strictures of the Caribbean, these were mainly white men, but, on occasion, there was also some of mixed race.

- William James Fergusson, born in Jamaica in 1795 to a black Jamaican mother and white Scottish father. He studied medicine at the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh. He obtained his Surgeon's license in December 1813 and joined the Army; he worked as an assistant surgeon in a military hospital.

He was sent to Sierra Leone in 1815 and spent the rest of his career in the colony, eventually rising to the position of Governor on 3rd May 1845. However, he was forced to leave the following December due to ill health and died in the New Year on the voyage to Britain. He is the first, currently known, regular British Army officer of black heritage.

- James Swaby, who joined the 49th Regiment of Foot as an Ensign on half pay at the age of 16 years in December 1814. He was the son of a white Jamaican planter and a woman who had one white parent and one black parent. Educated in England at Charterhouse School in Surrey, he married an English wife and inherited his father's property and slaves in Jamaica, eventually dying in Kingston, London 1863.

- The presence of black bandsmen in the British Army seems to have extended from the early 18th century until the early 19th century.

- Whilst they appear to have been well-treated in their regiments, black servicemen in Britain at this time did come across some racist treatment; a well reported story tells of one black soldier who, whilst walking along the Strand in London, was abused by a man, whom he promptly knocked down.

- Many, however, settled in Britain and married British women.

- William Afflick, born in St. Kitts 1781, married his English wife Elizabeth before 1810 and, after his service in the Napoleonic Wars, including in the Iberian Peninsula, France and the Battle of Waterloo, settled in Gore Lane, London and seems to have remained there until his death in 1855.

- Some did opt to return to the Caribbean, even though their freedom would have been much more limited than in Britain, due to the racial practices of the Plantocracy social structure that prevailed in the West Indies.

- George Rose was born into slavery in Spanish Town, Jamaica in 1787. He escaped to England and enlisted in the 73rd Regiment of Foot in August 1809, fighting in the European campaigns of the Napoleonic Wars, including the Battle of Waterloo where he was severely wounded in the arm.

He eventually rose to the rank of sergeant in 1831, the first known black regular soldier to do so. After his discharge in 1837, he lived in Glasgow for some years before returning to Jamaica in 1849 as a Methodist missionary. He remained in Jamaica until his death in 1873.

The West India Regiments

- By the mid-1790s, the wars with the French in the Caribbean were not going well for Britain and more men were required. However, there were issues with recruiting European troops and the high mortality rate amongst them meant that military minds had to consider new options with which to garrison and defend the West Indies.
- The largest body of people in the Caribbean was the black population, composed overwhelmingly of slaves.
- The black population also had the advantage of being more resistant to the most lethal diseases that killed so many European servicemen in the region.
- Previous slave regiments had been raised in the Caribbean, although these were not formally part of the British Army and had mainly been commanded by local officers. They were also only raised for a specific threat or combat, meaning they were not permanent.
- The Planters of the West Indies did not want a permanent regiment of black soldiers for two main reasons: firstly, they would be outside their control and secondly, they were worried that such black soldiers would lead to a slave rebellion.
- The Planters were thus reluctant to sell their slaves to the Army to create the Regiments, meaning the Army had to acquire men from other sources, in this case buying slaves as they directly arrived on ships from Africa. However, a few free men, both white and black also elected to join the West India Regiments.
- Recruits had to be, as a general guide, between 16-22 years old, be at least 5ft and 5 inches tall, in good health and capable of bearing arms.
- Two Regiments were established in 1795 and over the years more were created, reaching a total of 12 between 1799 and 1802. After this, the number declined in response to a reduced need. For most of their existence, there were just two Regiments/battalions. The remaining two Regiments were fused into a single regiment with two battalions in 1888.
- The British Army bought an estimated 13,400 slaves between 1795 and 1807, which is believed to have made them one of the biggest, if not the largest, slave owner of the time. This cost almost £1 million pounds at the time (£100 million today).
- Although the Army had purchased these men as slaves, it went to great lengths to ensure that they were not treated as slaves, and the Government in London also ordered this. The men of the West India Regiments received the same pay and rations of food as their white counterparts, and also received the same medical care, as well as the same punishments if they broke the rules.

- Unlike slaves, the word of a black soldier could be accepted as legal testimony in court and black sergeants were entrusted with the command of outposts, something that would have been unthinkable for a slave.
- Senior army officers also worked to ensure that the men had a comfortable retirement. General Sir Ralph Abercromby, commanding the forces in the West Indies, issued a decree in 1797 that all men discharged from the West India Regiments were free men and that they should have a pension of a shilling a day. West Indian governments largely ignored this.
- The West Indian local governments attempted to exercise some control over the men of the West India Regiments, by making them subject to slave laws. In one instance, this included the arrest of some soldiers and holding them in a civil jail for over a year without trial. They also hounded West India Regiment veterans, trying to ensure they did not settle near plantations for fear that they would encourage a slave rebellion.
- The legal debate over whether the men of the West India Regiments were slaves or free continued for several years, until it was resolved by the passing of the Mutiny Act 1807, the annual act that provided for a standing Army's continued existence. The Act received Royal Assent on 23rd March 1807, two days before the act that abolished the slave trade.

Section CII of the Mutiny Act 1807

And be it further enacted, That from and after the passing of this Act, all Negroes purchased by or on account of His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and serving in any of His Majesty's Forces, shall be deemed and taken to be free, to all Intents and for all Purposes whatever, in like Manner in every respect as if such Negroes had been born free in any Part of His Majesty's Dominions; and that such Negroes shall also to all intents and Purposes whatever, be considered as Soldiers having voluntary enlisted in His Majesty's Service.

Africa and the Caribbean

- The West India Regiments' responsibilities were divided between Africa and the Caribbean. Garrisoning and protecting the Caribbean was, of course, the reason they had originally been created, but they were also sent to garrison West Africa because the climate and diseases there had proved similarly lethal to white troops, whilst black troops had proved more resistant.
- In Africa they served in countless small expeditions and conflicts, defending British Imperial interests and that of their local allies. This involved expeditions against slavers, both African and from other continents, freeing those who had been forced into slavery.
- Some of the campaigns they engaged in included the Badibu War (1861), the five Ashanti Wars (1823-24, 1863-64, 1873-74, 1895-96, 1900), the 1893 expedition against the Sofas of the Wassoulou Empire and the 'Hut Tax' War (1898-99).



Locations where the West India Regiment served in West Africa

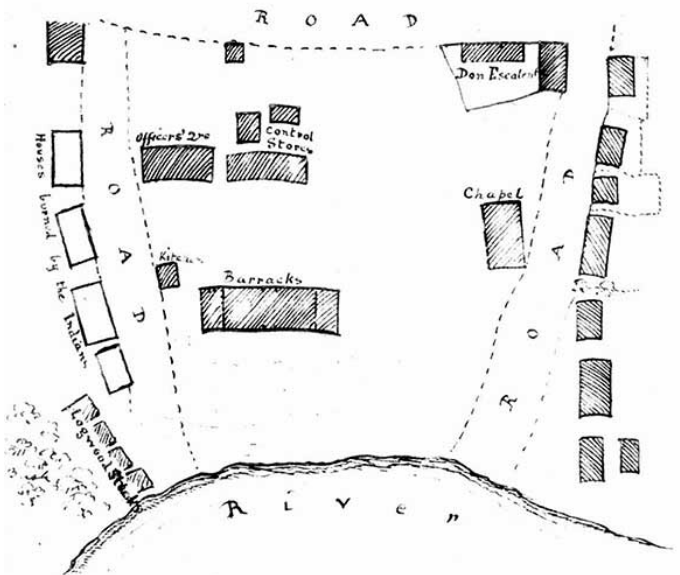
- In the Caribbean, with the main threat to the British colonies having passed after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the main challenges they faced were matters of local unrest, responding to natural disasters and the occasional incursion into British territory in Southern and Central America.
- Local unrest in the early years of the century meant responding to slave rebellions. Around the tense period of abolition in the 1830s, black soldiers had to help keep the peace during this huge change to the social structure of the Caribbean.

- The infamous Morant Bay Rebellion started on 11th October 1865 when Baptist Preacher Paul Bogle led a crowd to the Court House at Morant Bay to protest against the continuing racial inequalities in Jamaican society and violence broke out. Martial law was declared and regiments stationed all over Jamaica sent troops to the affected area to restore order. This response proved particularly brutal, with soldiers carrying out summary executions and burning property.

- Natural disasters included fires; they helped in extinguishing the blaze, rescuing property and in keeping civil order and calm. Earthquakes could prove similarly deadly; in the earthquake that struck Kingston, Jamaica, 14th January 1907 two officers were killed and men were injured, some of whom died of their wounds. 24 men, who were in the hospital at the time of the earthquake, were killed by a fire that it caused.

- Such tasks were by no means free from risk; in the fire that broke out in Belize in 18th July 1854 many of the men were severely burned, with Lance Corporal William Maturin dying of his injuries.

- The most notable incursion they had to face was at Orange Walk, British Guiana (modern day Belize). Although now a large town, it was then a small village, with a small detachment of thirty-eight men of the 1st West India Regiment, serving as garrison. In the early morning of 1st September 1872, 180 fighting men, supported by 100 camp followers, drew near to the small military outpost and took the West India Regiment by surprise.



A map of the barracks at Orange Walk, 1872

- The defenders barricaded themselves in the barracks, using their mattresses to provide themselves with some cover, whilst Sergeant Edward Belizario ran to retrieve the ammunition box, at great personal risk to himself, eventually being forced to pass packets of ammunition under the eaves of the roof.

- The engagement lasted six hours, with the West India Regiment's only reinforcements being two American volunteers and the local police magistrate and two constables.

- Two of the West India Regiment, Privates Lynch and Bidwell, were killed, whilst fifteen others were severely wounded, including Lieutenant Smith, the commanding officer.

- Sergeant Belizario was given the sum of £10 a year and the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his actions. Lance-Corporals Spencer and Stirling were also given promotions to full corporal, as well as the Distinguished Conduct Medal. The officers present, Lieutenant Smith and Staff-Assistant Surgeon Edge, were also promoted.

The First World War

- The West India Regiment served in the campaigns in West Africa, which ended when the German forces in the colony of Togoland surrendered on 26th August 1914.
- They also fought in the Cameroons campaign between September 1914-16 and then in August 1916 were sent to German East Africa, where they fought German forces under the command of General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck.
- The First World War was the West India Regiment's last major conflict and they were disbanded in 1927 due to the changing priorities of Imperial Defence and military cut backs in the inter-war years.
- Outside the West India Regiment, many Caribbean men wished to contribute to the War effort. Many paid their own way to cross the Caribbean and enlist in British regiments.
- Many more, however, did not have the resources to do this and Caribbean governments proposed that a new fighting regiment could be formed to draw on these large numbers of willing volunteers. The Colonial Office supported this offer.
- The War Office was, however, reluctant to accept a new fighting regiment, instead wanting West Indian volunteers to serve as Labour units, being responsible for a variety of tasks, such as the transportation of ammunition.
- King George V eventually learned of the situation and, with his personal support and intervention, the War Office was forced to back down. The British West Indies Regiment was thus born in 1915.
- Over 15,000 men from the Caribbean, of all different ethnicities, volunteered to join.
- The racial policies of the time meant that the War Office did not want the predominantly black British West Indies Regiment fighting in Europe against white Germans. Instead, they still wanted to use the West Indians for the vital and important task of Labour battalions on the Western Front.
- At the same time, there were considerations about how not using the Regiment in combat would affect recruitment and how it would look politically in the Caribbean.
- Recruitment in the Caribbean was affected by the Halifax incident, when *SS Verdala*, carrying a contingent of volunteers from the Caribbean to Britain, was forced to divert due to enemy activity to Halifax, Nova Scotia. With a broken heating system aboard ship and a lack of warm clothing, several men caught frostbite and some had to have fingers and toes amputated. People in the Caribbean were understandably angered by this.
- In the end, a compromise of sorts was reached. Whilst the majority of the British West

Indies Regiment was sent to Europe to serve as Labour battalions on the Western Front, three battalions were sent to Egypt to fight in the Middle Eastern Theatre against the Turkish Ottoman Empire.

- The 1st and 2nd battalions were the ones who fought in the Middle East, whilst the 5th battalion that accompanied them was a reserve and training unit.
- The battalions in the Middle East took part in the advance towards Jerusalem, the assault on the Gaza-Beersheba line and the Jordan Valley campaign.
- They were praised for their service, being particularly noted in the Jordan Valley campaign for their steady advance in the face of heavy enemy fire. Several men were awarded medals for acts of bravery, such as for carrying messages through heavy enemy fire or singlehandedly capturing an enemy machine gun post.
- For the men in Europe, they were not always totally happy with the situation in which they found themselves, being denied the opportunity to fight, but they nevertheless seemed to take a certain pride in their work, referring to themselves as the King George Steam Engine, reflecting the tough, physical nature of their work, and their personal connection to the Monarch.
- Service as labour battalions did not mean the men were in no danger. The British West Indies Regiment carried ammunition in some of the most famous battles of the war, under heavy enemy fire. This included the Battle of the Somme.



Men of the British West Indies Regiment in France

- The men on the Western Front also demonstrated considerable bravery. Several men were awarded the Military Medal for the way they endured great personal danger, working to extinguish fires caused by enemy bombing on ammunition dumps and trying to recover ammunition before the flames caused it to explode.
- The British West Indies Regiment was disbanded in 1919 after the end of the war.

For more information on the First World War, please visit our [website](#): or you can purchase a copy of our book *The Caribbean's Great War*, available [through our store](#).

The Second World War

- There was also a large number of volunteers in the Second World War, who joined a variety of different regiments and units, including notably the Royal Engineers. By the end of 1942, West Indians could be found in over 40 different regiments.
- Many also joined the Royal Navy, and most notably over 6,500 West Indians joined the RAF.
- Again the suggestion was made for a new fighting Regiment to be created, but the War Office was again reluctant. Even the need for Labour units was not so desperate as in the First World War.
- The Colonial Office continued to support the notion, and it even gained support from Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who suggested they could be of use in the Far Eastern theatre in Singapore.
- The War Office eventually gave in by December 1943 and the 1st battalion of the Caribbean Regiment was created, for what was, in truth, political reasons rather than military ones.
- However, the Army was warned that its military value needed to be balanced against political considerations.
- The Caribbean Regiment first trained in Virginia USA, then was sent to Italy in July 1944, where it was deemed they needed more training before they could fight, although they were able to assist as labourers for a time.
- The Caribbean Regiment was sent to Egypt in October 1944. On Christmas Eve that year, a black sergeant of the Caribbean Regiment and a white soldier had an altercation in a dance hall, which led to a fight that lasted for several hours, involving the rest of the regiment.
- The Regiment barricaded themselves in a hotel and refused to surrender to the British Provost Marshal until an agreement was brokered by American military police.
- The Regiment was moved to a camp near the Red Sea, but the Army was unable to arrange large scale formation training for them, vital to fighting on the battlefield.
- In the end, the Caribbean Regiment never saw battle.



The Caribbean Regiment training in Egypt

- The other great Caribbean contribution was in the Auxiliary Territorial Service, an organisation staffed by women to support the war effort in non-combatant roles.
- This included work as drivers, clerks, orderlies and nurses. As the war progressed, this grew to include other responsibilities, including military police and part of anti-aircraft gun crew, although they were not officially allowed to fire the guns.
- The War Office was initially reluctant to accept black volunteers, although they welcomed white West Indian women. However, after mistakenly accepting a Miss L. Curtis, a black Bermudian, the War Office relaxed its racial policies and, by the end of the war, half of the 600 ATS volunteers from the Caribbean were black.
- Despite the War Office's policies, they do appear to have accepted Black West Indian volunteers before 1943, such as Private Ivy Belboda of Trinidad, who was in London studying at the outbreak of the war and by 1942 was already serving in the ATS.



West Indian ATS volunteers at
the Colonial Office 1944

Uniforms

- West Indian soldiers were originally dressed in the traditional woollen red coats of the British Army.

- Each of the initial West India Regiments could be distinguished from one another by the lining and facings on their jackets.

- As many thousands of British soldiers discovered over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this traditional uniform was largely unsuitable for service in the tropical climate of the Caribbean, and indeed in West Africa.

West India Regiment	Facings
1 st	White, with white lace, black line
2 nd	Yellow, with white lace, green, yellow and purple line
3 rd	Yellow, with white lace and a wide black line
4 th	Yellow, with white lace with yellow, blue and yellow lines
5 th	Green, with white lace, plain
6 th	Yellow, with white lace, black line
7 th	Yellow, with lace and brown, yellow, scarlet line
8 th	First raising: Grey, white lace with red, yellow and black line Second raising: Green, with white lace, plain
9 th	Yellow, with white lace with a blue, yellow and blue line
10 th	Buff, with white lace with a black and scarlet edge
11 th	Green, with white lace with a narrow green edge
12 th	Buff, with white lace with a black and scarlet edge

- Although attempts were made to adapt the uniform for a tropical climate, none were very successful.

- In the 1850s, new uniforms were considered for the West India Regiments, better suited for the environments they found themselves in. It was eventually decided to adapt the uniform worn by the French Zouave troops, raised in Algeria, North Africa.

- Popular legend says that Queen Victoria designed the uniforms herself, but this is demonstrably untrue, instead being the work of officials in the War Office. She did, however, give her express permission for the change to be made.



Green facings of the 5th West India Regiment

- To replace the identifying facing marks on the old uniforms, the West India Regiments were instead identified by the colours of the tassels on their fezzes.

- The West India Regiment joined the rest of the British Army in adopting Khaki at the end of the nineteenth century, but the Zouave uniform was kept for full dress occasions.



Fez tassel

- The Zouave uniform survived the disbandment of the West India Regiment in 1927, as the uniform of the Jamaica military band. It is still used today as the uniform of the military bands of both the Jamaican and Barbadian defence forces.

The Victoria Cross

- The Victoria Cross was created in 1856, in the aftermath of the Crimean War. Named for Queen Victoria and created by her at the request of Prince Albert, it is awarded only for the most exceptional acts of bravery by military personnel.
- Since 1902 it has been allowed to be awarded posthumously, although there is only one instance of a soldier of West Indian heritage being such a recipient, Frank Alexander de Pass, scion of a prominent Jamaican family.
- Frank Alexander de Pass was also the first Jewish awardee of the Victoria Cross.
- Samuel Hodge of Tortola, British Virgin Islands, was the second ever black awardee, after William Hall, a Canadian serving in the Royal Navy.
- Each medal is identifiable as the date of the action for which the award was given and the name, rank and regiment of the recipient is engraved on the rear of each medal.
- Less than 1,400 Victoria Crosses have been awarded since its institution, many of these in its early years. Only 15 have been awarded between the end of the Second World War and 2021. Amongst them is Johnson Beharry from Grenada, the latest West Indian recipient.
- They are cast out of bronze, with the earliest ones being made of bronze from Russian cannons captured in the Crimean War.

The British Army and the Caribbean Today

- The West India Regiments were briefly resurrected in the late 1950s to be the armed forces for the West Indies Federation but they were dissolved again when the Federation collapsed in 1962.
- These resurrected regiments formed the basis of the Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago Defence Forces.
- The former British colonies, that have become independent since the end of the Second World War, have established their own defence forces, many of whom still retain close links with the British Army, cooperating with them in training and the like.
- Many Caribbean defence forces send their officer candidates for training at the British Military Academy at Sandhurst.
- The British Army is also working with the Caribbean Defence Forces to establish a new Officer Training Academy in the Caribbean.
- The British Army, in addition to training in the Caribbean, often lends assistance after natural disasters in the region, such as hurricanes.
- The British Army, and the rest of the British armed forces, also retain responsibility for the defence of the British Overseas Territories in the Caribbean: Anguilla, the Cayman Islands, Montserrat, the British Virgin Islands and the Turks & Caicos Islands.
- At the beginning of 2020, two new Reserve Regiments were created: the Turks & Caicos Regiment and the Cayman Islands Regiment in their respective overseas territories. Like the rest of the Army Reserve, members must participate in training every few weeks and attend an annual camp.
- These two new West Indian regiments are meant principally to provide security and aid after natural disasters, such as hurricanes and earthquakes.

Activity Answers

Quiz

- Q1.** Who was the first black West Indian Officer in the British Army?
A1. William Fergusson
- Q2.** By what nickname was the British West Indies Regiment known on the Western Front?
A2. *The King George Steam Engine*
- Q3.** Soldiers Watler and Bodden were the first permanent settlers of which British Overseas Territory?
A3. The Cayman Islands
- Q4.** What year were the men of the West India Regiments declared to be free men?
A4. 1807
- Q5.** Who was the first West Indian to be awarded the Victoria Cross?
A5. Henry Edward Jerome
- Q6.** In what country did the Battle of Orange Walk take place?
A6. British Guiana/Belize
- Q7.** How many years were the 38th Regiment stationed in the Caribbean?
A.7 57 years
- Q8.** Which King supported the creation of the British West Indies Regiment?
A8. George V
- Q9.** What was the organisation that Caribbean Women volunteered to join in the Second World War?
A9. The Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS)
- Q10.** What former British Army Base in Jamaica is still used by the Jamaica Defence Force?
A10. Up Park Camp

Activity Answers

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 Answers

Complete the sentence



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

St. Lucia changed hands on 14 occasions.



The British West Indies Regiment fought the Ottoman Empire in the **Middle East**.

Many early West Indian soldiers served in the British Army as **musicians**.



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

Sergeant George Rose served at the Battle of Waterloo.



Johnson Beharry was born in **Grenada**.

The Turks & Caicos Regiment is a **Reserve** Regiment

Use the following words to complete the sentences

Middle East

Sergeant

Grenada

Musicians

Private

French

St. Lucia

Reserve

This teachers 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.

