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WAR
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CONFERENCE PAPER • LT COL. MUHAMMAD LUTFUL HAQ



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Bengali Volunteers of Candannagar in the French Army

Abstract

During the colonial period, Candannagar (or Chandernagore) was a French enclave city with an area of 19 sq. km and 30 km north of Kolkata. There were a few more French enclave cities in India till 1947. During the WW1, French had only 500 sq. km area and 250,000 populations in India.

WW1 broke out on 28 July 1914. France joined war on 3 August 1914. France had a great deal of setback in the initial days of war. To recover and resist German advance, France needed lot of soldiers. France started massive recruitment of combatant and non-combatant soldiers from her home and colonies. France decided to recruit soldiers from India in December 1915. Recruitment policy was circulated in January 1916. Notice and advertisement for recruitment was made public in February 1916. Good number of people came forward from Candannagar and 20 Bengali young men were recruited from there. In mid-April, these selected persons were sent to Pondicherry, another French enclave, for military training. On 16 April 1916, a grand farewell party was arranged at Candannagar in honour of these Bengali soldiers. Two months later 12 more Bengali young men were selected from Candannagar and sent to Pondicherry for training. Out of these 32 persons 26 completed their training successfully and were sent to France to serve the army. After reaching France they were posted to different units, mostly in Artillery, and joined the war. Bengali soldiers fought in different battle fields of France, Morocco and Tunisia.

All these Bengali soldiers got commemorative medals of WW1 and one of them got Croix de Geurre for his outstanding performance in the army. Bengali soldiers served for 3 years and came back to Candannagar except Monoranjan Das who died in France due to illness.

Profile

Muhammad Lutful Haq was born in 1955. Passed Higher Secondary Examination and joined army in 1977 and after serving for 28 years got retired as Lt Col in 2005. Now serving with Daily Prothom Alo as Advisor Research and Archives. Doing research on military history of Bengalis and War of Independence. Has keen interest on Archives and Records Management and Right to Information. Has few publications in his credit.