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**WAR**  
**AND COLONIES**  
**1914-1918**

CONFERENCE PAPER • PROF. DR RICHARD FOGARTY



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# Between France and Germany: North African Muslims as Soldiers and Prisoners in the Great War

## **Abstract**

Between 1914 and 1918, the French army deployed some 500,000 colonial subjects on European battlefields to defend the nation. More than half of these soldiers were Muslims from North Africa, and French military and political officials went to a great deal of trouble in their attempts to accommodate Muslim religious beliefs and practices, and sometimes even to ameliorate the political and civic status of Muslim colonial subjects within the framework of the French colonial empire. The results of these attempts were often ambiguous and even contradictory, but they reveal a great deal about French attitudes toward Islam during this era. In addition, examining the experiences of those among these soldiers captured by the Germans, pressured by their captors to behave as “good Muslims” and to take up arms against France and its allies, also helps illustrate German attitudes about and policies toward the Muslim world. These events demonstrate some of the ways that two of the war’s major belligerents made Islam, and the loyalty of its adherents, major points of contention in this global war, a war that was a clash of empires and of competing visions of imperial control. Finally, many of these North Africans survived their captivity and the war, and many had incredible stories to tell, stories that can help us connect the global and imperial struggle involving Islam with the personal experience of particular Muslims.

## **Profile**

Richard S. Fogarty is Associate Professor of History at the University at Albany, State University of New York. His book, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918* (2008) examines French racial attitudes and colonial and military policies during the Great War, and his most recent publication is a co-edited volume entitled *Empires in World War I: Shifting Frontiers and Imperial Dynamics in a Global Conflict*. He is currently working on a general history of France and its colonial empire at war between 1914–18, seeking to highlight the centrality of the French war experience to the global story of the Great War, and to underline the importance of the colonial empire to that experience. A second current project explores the role of Muslims and Islam in the Great War through the stories of French North African Muslim soldiers who were taken prisoner by the Germans.