

Headteacher's assembly 6th October 2025: Black History Month: the contribution of people of colour to British Military Service

Thinking time whilst the children enter assembly:

What do these film posters have in common?



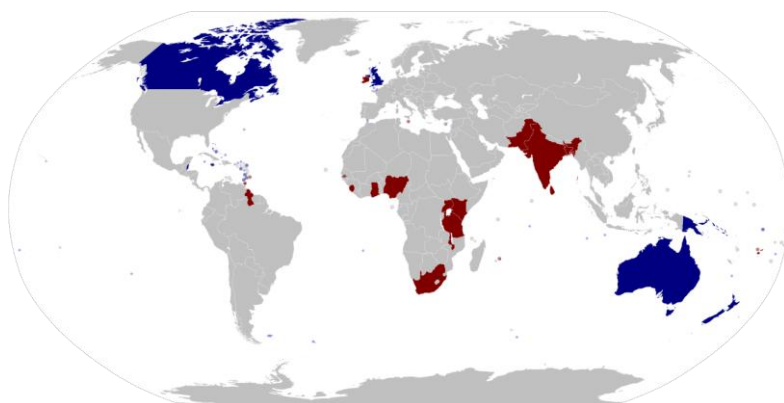
The children came up with lots of similarities but they did eventually discuss how they were all men and all white. But was the war just fought by white men? Is that who we remember on Remembrance Day? Of course not! We remember all those who were a part of the war effort, including the animals.



I introduced Idris Elba, a famous British actor. He discovered that his Grandfather was a part of the D-Day landings during the Second World War. It inspired him to create the documentary *Erased: WWII Heroes of Colour*. Idris wanted to ensure the contribution of people of colour to the war effort is recognised:

‘There’s this particular story that hasn’t been told, which is the idea that the war was populated with people of colour and you just really never saw that, ever . . . the camera was shifted away from them almost deliberately.’

Contribution of the Commonwealth



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I asked the children to see how many countries they could identify from the Commonwealth (which included countries who were part of it at the time of the First World War). Lots of countries were identified from right across the globe; New Zealand, Fiji, Ghana, Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Jamaica, Barbados, Canada and Grenada to name just a few. They all contributed.

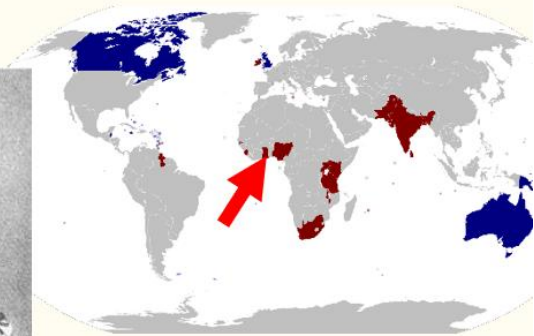


We then looked together at the contributions of eight people of colour who made significant contributions to war efforts in the 20th Century. The heroes who Idris Elba will have been thinking of! We took a more detailed look at each person, continue reading to see them.



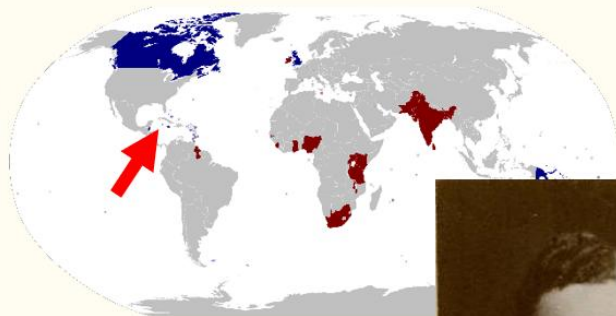
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colour to British Military Service**

Sergeant Major Alhaji Grunshi



- First World War
- Ghanaian and Muslim
- Gold Coast Regiment,
West African Frontier Force
- Grunshi fired the first shot of the First World War on 7 August 1914, four days
before firing began on the Western Front
- He was awarded the Military Medal and the Distinguished Conduct Medal in
1919

**Sergeant William
Robinson 'Robbie' Clark**
(Oct 1895 – April 1981)



- First World War
- Jamaican and Christian
- Royal Flying Corps
(before it became known as the Royal Air Force, or RAF)
- He became the first Black pilot to fly for Britain
- On one mission in 1917, he was shot but safely landed
his plane.



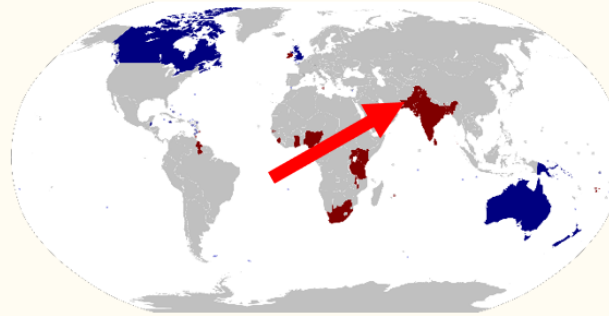
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Subedar (Officer) Mir Dast (Dec 1874 – Jan 1945)

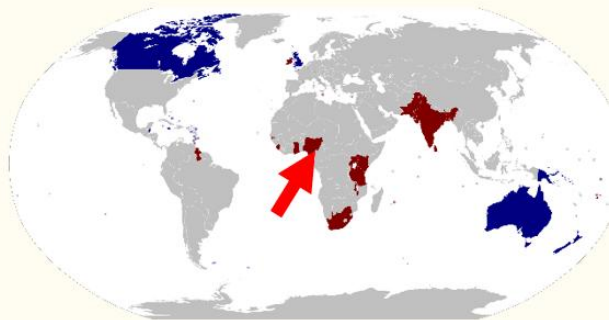


- First World War
- From British India (Pakistan), Muslim
- Indian Expeditionary Force
- He was awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery. On 26 April 1915, he rescued eight men from no man's land while wounded - The medal was presented to him by King George V himself



Princess Omo-Oba Adenrele Ademola (Jan 1916 – unknown)

- Second World War
- Nigerian and Christian
- Qualified as a nurse in 1941
- She worked in several London hospitals during the Blitz and throughout the war

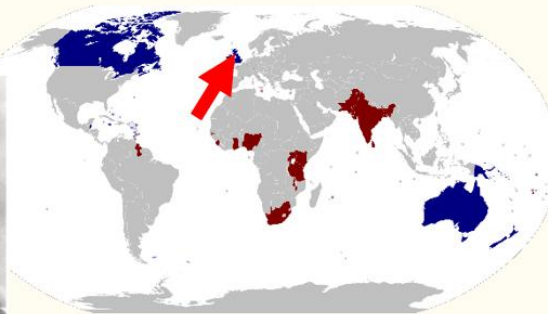


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Corporal Lilian Bader

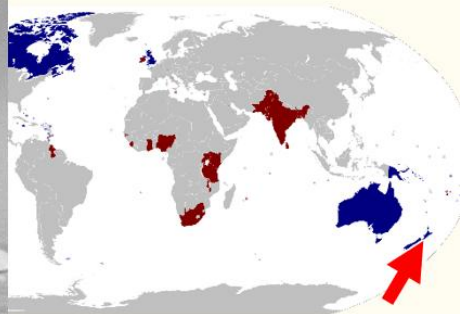
(Feb 1918 – March 2015)



- Second World War
- British-Barbadian from Liverpool and Christian
- Women's Auxiliary Air Force
- She was one of the first women to qualify as an instrument repairer in 1941
- She remained in the WAAF until February 1944, when she became pregnant with her first son

Padre Wī Huata

(Sept 1917 – Dec 1991)



- Second World War
- Māori (New Zealand) and Christian
- Chaplain with the 28th New Zealand (Māori) Battalion
- Led Anglican services in English and Māori, helped the wounded during battle
- He also organized entertainment for his soldiers and was famous for his singing
- He was awarded the Military Cross in 1945

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Sergeant Talaiasi

Labalaba

(2nd from the right)

(July 1942 – July 1972)

- Cold War (1947–1991)
- Fijian and Christian
- Special Air Service (SAS)



- He was mentioned in dispatches for single-handedly manning a 25-pounder field gun for over two and a half hours against at least 250 fighters, even after being wounded.

Warrant Officer Class 2 Johnson Beharry

(July 1979 – present)

- Iraq War (2003–2011)
- Grenadian and Christian
- Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment

- He was awarded the Victoria Cross in 2005 for saving his crew after two occasions when the armoured vehicle that he was driving was ambushed. - In 2014, Beharry set up a charity to counter gangs in London

