

The Indian Army - About training units under First World War - Part II

Strength figure

The following information is taken from *the Field Service Pocket Book (1914)* (Source 6), which, however, does not give information on the detailed organization of the units.

Cavalry Brigade Supply Column, 1914

Employee	Number of animals, equipment and coachman Number	
Officer (English)	1 Riding horses	8
NCOs and Privates (English)	5 Mules (draught animals)	186
NCOs and Privates (Indian)	5 Mule carts	93
Helpers (on the official payroll) 53 Coachmen		93
Helpers (privately paid) 9		

Infantry Division Supply Column, 1914

Employee	Number of animals and tree coach Number	
Officers (English)	7 Riding horses	20
NCOs and Privates (English)	16 Camels	636
NCOs and Privates (Indian)	22 Train driver	235
Helpers (on the official payroll) 250		
Helpers (privately paid)	42	

Infantry Division Supply Park, 1914

Employee	Number of animals and tree coach Number	
Officers (English)	2 Riding horses	7
NCOs and Privates (English)	5 Camels	1.215
NCOs and Privates (Indian)	5 Train driver	425
Helpers (on the official payroll) 33		
Helpers (privately paid) 7		

Coolie Corps, 1914

Employee	Number of Animals	Quantity
Officer (English)	1 Riding horses	3
Officers (Indian)	1 Bearers are organized in groups (<i>gangs</i>) of 20, under a chairman (<i>headman</i>). 6 4 groups	
NCOs and Privates (English)	form a platoon, under the leadership of a conductor 1)	
NCOs and Privates (Indian)	(<i>conductor</i>). —	

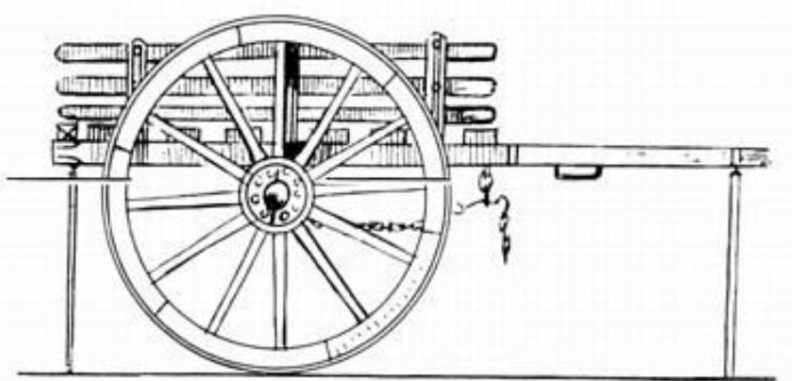
Helpers (on the official payroll) 1,016 a badge with the individual's number. Porters are registered at the unit and assigned to each individual's number.
 Helpers (privately paid) 3

The capacity of the training units

Capacity	Load capacity 2)	Cruising speed 3)	—
Pack mules and horses	80 kg	5 km/h	
Camels	200 kg 400 kg 400-480 kg 80 kg	3 km/h	
Mule carts	60 kg	4 km/h	
Oxcarts	20 kg	2 km/h	
Pakokser		3 km/h	
Package donkeys		2 km/h	
Carriers		3 km/h	

In Source 6's section on marching and marching discipline, the importance of taking these limits into account is emphasized, as well as that the animals need a considerable amount of time to consume and digest their food - at least 5 hours for horses and 5-6 hours for camels and oxen.

Camels and oxen march best in the time period 16:00 - 09:00, when the temperature is lowest.



Cart, Maltese, Mk. IV 4). —

This is the closest I can get to a principle sketch of the *AT Cart* (= Army Transport Cart) that was used as a mule cart.

The cart weighed (empty) approx. 280 kg and could load a good 400 kg.



Mule cart, France, 1914.

From a contemporary French postcard.

Again, the alert photographer has been in place, and captured this crew together with an Indian doctor (*Indian Medical Department*) and an English sanitary non-commissioned officer.

The mule cart is probably the doctor's means of transport.



Indian mule cart, 1914.

From a contemporary French postcard.

A number of training units also came with the Indian Expeditionary Force which arrived in France in September 1914, but it has not been possible to determine exactly which units were included.

France, 1914-15

My sources mention the following:

- 9th Mule Corps or 23rd Mule Corps 5) —

- Indore Transport Corps and Barotpore Transport Corps.



Indian mule cart, 1914.

From a contemporary French postcard.

Per 8 January 1915, the training units are reorganized into the 3rd (Lahore) Division and 7th (Meerut) Division, and thus come on a par with the English infantry divisions.

The units now come from the English Army Service Corps, but to what extent the purely Indian mule companies continue to exist I am not aware.

3rd (Lahore) Division Pr.

september 1914 Supply and Transport Corps med:

- Divisional Train and Indian Mule Corps

As of 8 January 1915 Army Service Corps with:

- 428th, 429th, 430th & 431st Company 68th
- Company (Motorized Ammunition Park) 69th Company
- (Motorized Supply Column)

7th (Meerut) Division (Kilde 8)

Pr. september 1914 Supply and Transport Corps med:

- Divisional Train and Indian Mule Corps

As of 8 January 1915 Army Service Corps with:

- 432nd, 433rd, 434th & 435th Companies 67th
- Company (Motorized Supply Column) 70th Company
- (Motorized Ammunition Park)



Indian wooden carriage [6](#)) passes the statue of Joan of Arc on the Place du Martroi in Orléans [7](#)). [___](#)

From a contemporary French postcard.

When the divisions are sent to Egypt in November 1915, and later to Mesopotamia (1916-17) and Palestine (1918), the training units are again from the Supply and Transport Corps, but I am not clear which sub-units these are.

Source 11 mentions that not all Indian units were quite sure who this Joan of Arc was, and to be safe, many units therefore chose to salute when passing her statue.

Challenges in the catering service



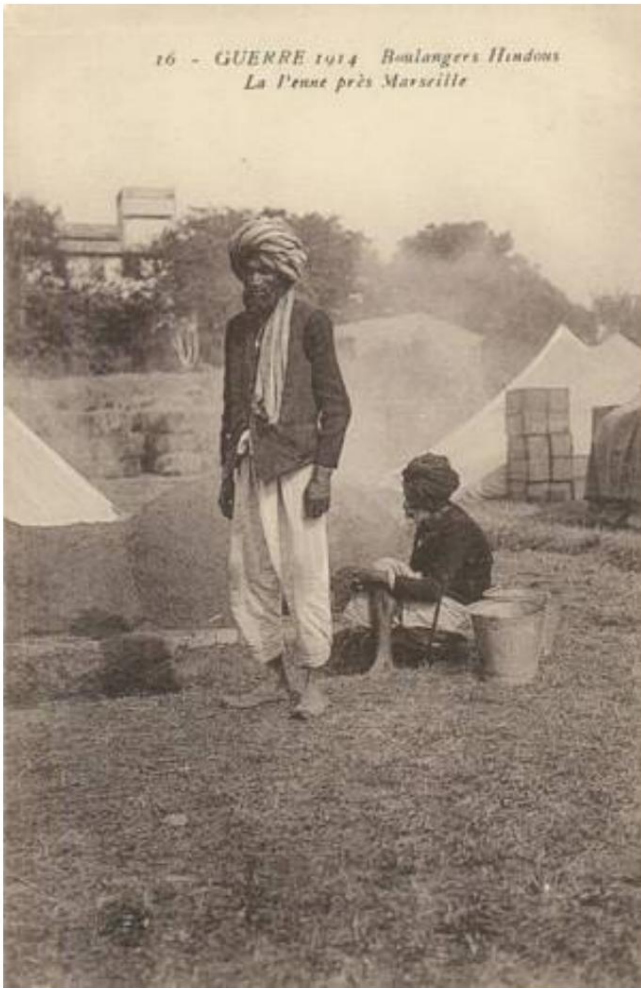
Rail transport of Indian soldiers, 1914.

From a contemporary French postcard, stamped 13 December 1914 and sent as field mail, i.e. without stamp.

The supply lines for the forces in France went via Marseilles, where the Supply and Transport Corps from 10 September 1914 manned No. 5 Base Supply Depot.

From here the lines stretched approx. 1,000 km north, via rail, to the Expeditionary Force supply point in Lillers.

In Marseilles was a large food depot, with live animals. This depot was supplied during the war with 95,246 goats and 175,158 sheep - animals which, along with chickens, are known to be acceptable food for members of most religions, except for vegetarians (including the Bhramin Company of the 9th *Bhopal* Infantry) , naturally.



Indian baker, in a tent camp near Marseilles, 1914.

From a contemporary French postcard.

Source 11 mentions the challenge of supplying soldiers of different faiths and corresponding eating habits.

In practice, most Indian soldiers had a relatively pragmatic attitude to the question of "clean" food, and under field conditions ate what was available.

However, they expected their officers to ensure that they were given religiously acceptable rations as much as possible.

In Lillers, 4 representatives from each unit monitored that the animals were slaughtered properly - halal 8) - which, among other things, entails that "all" blood must drain from the animal before death occurs. It is achieved by cutting the blood arteries in the neck, whereby the animal's heart slowly pumps the blood out until exhalation.

In order to withstand the climate, it was found necessary to increase the meat content in the rations, first with frozen meat and then with canned meat.

Unfortunately, the company that received the order for tinned mutton and lamb had a bull as its logo. This not unnaturally gave rise to rumors that the soldiers were now forced to eat beef - a mortal sin for Hindus.

However, it was not about the beef (*bully-beef*) that was included in the rations of the English soldiers, but about mutton, mutton or lamb, in English called *mutton*, which is why the rations were aptly called *bully-mutton*.

The religious objections to tinned meat are mentioned in the fictional part of Roly Grimshaw's memoirs *Indian Cavalry Officer 1914-15, Experiences of Ram Singh, Dafadar of Horse* (Source 12).

It is mentioned here that the nestor among the Indian soldiers in France - the 70-year-old Maharaja of Jodhpur, whose English title was Lieutenant General Sir Pertab Singh - became involved in the case. He had to taste the tinned meat, and say yes to it, before the last vestige of suspicion - at least officially - was removed.



Sir Douglas Haig introduces Sir Pertab Singh to General Joffre.

Reproduced from a postcard in the series Official War Photographs (Series 1, No. 6), published by the Daily Mail.

Perhaps it is an anecdote, but it does not sound improbable, all the while that the matter was considered with great seriousness - from the corps commander - Lieutenant-General Sir James Willcocks [9](#) - down to the youngest privates.

The text on the back of the card reads as follows:

"I hope the time is soon coming when at the head of my men I shall die fighting." So says our grand old man of India, Lieutenant-General Sir Pertab Singh.

Regardless of the rhetorical death wish and the taste test, Sir Pertab did not fall at the head of his men - The Jodhpur Lancers - but lived until 1922 [10](#).

To complete the story of the soldiers' rations, it can be added that a "standard ration" was developed consisting of rice, lentils and vegetables. *Chapattis* (unleavened, Indian bread [11](#)) accompanied, when it was possible to produce it, the rations, otherwise crackers. In addition, there was meat for the soldiers who had to eat it [12](#).

Egypt and Palestine 1914-1918

Apart from the information about the Indore Transport Corps (see earlier), the sources report nothing about which special training units were deployed in Egypt or Palestine.

Especially in the Palestine campaign, many Indian units took part, but the supply service was largely operated by English, Australian and New Zealand units, supported by units consisting of, among others Egyptians who had been recruited for the purpose. The training units were served by many camel companies and

donkey companies.

A Brief Record of the Advance of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, July 1917 to October 1918 (Source 13) gives a good insight into the supply service on this front section [13](#). _____

7th Mule Corps 52nd Camel Corps 10th
Mule Corps Kolat Camel Corps
12th Mule Corps Las Bela Camel Corps
13th Mule Corps Khaipur Camel Corps
30th Mule Corps Jaipur Cart Transport Train

Mesopotamia, 1914-1916

The Imperial Service units were included in line with the regular units, e.g. in *6th (Poona) Infantry Division* [14](#), which i.a. [fought](#) at Basra in September 1914.



10th Mule Corps, Basra, 1914.
From [FirstWorldWar.com](#)

Source 1 mentions that *the Jaipur Cart Transport Train* particularly distinguished itself at the Battle of Shaiba ([April 1915](#) [15](#)) where their hasty advance to evacuate the wounded raised a violent cloud of dust.

The dust cloud caused panic in the Turkish lines, believing that the dust cloud was hiding advancing cavalry.



Bullock carts, Mesopotamia [16](#)). _____

It is not a given that the picture of the bullock carts shows soldiers from Jaipur, but you do get a sense of the dust.



Indian mule cart stuck in mud, Mesopotamia.

However, it wasn't always dry...



Gallipoli, 1915
Sergeant Major of The Indian
Mule Cart Transport Corps.
From Source 16.

Gallipoli, 1915

Before the campaign to Gallipoli, a mule company, called *The Indian Mule Cart Transport Corps*, is created in France (at *Marseilles*). The unit, commanded by Lt. Col. CH Beville, includes

Indore Transport Corps and *Baratpore Transport Corps*. He is later replaced by Major HM Alexander, Supply and Transport Corps,

Various Gallipoli sources, i.a. Source 16, mentions that the major described his experiences in the book *On Two Fronts: Being the adventures of an Indian mule corps in France and Gallipoli*, Heinemann, London 1917. Apart from the small extract reproduced in Source 16, I know nothing more about the book

The Mule Company is landed at Brighton Beach (in Anzac Cove) in support of The Australian and New Zealand Division. The company's task consists, among other things, of in transporting supplies from the coast and to supply points inland. On the flat coastal stretches, the company can use its mule carts, but must use the mules as pack animals in rougher terrain.



Ammunition laid out on the beach at Anzac Cove.

Reproduced from Source 17, where the author, who also took the picture himself, has given it the subtitle: *Ammunition from every Arsenal in India.*



Indian Mule Cart Transport being evacuated from Gallipoli, 15 and 16 December 1915.

From Source 16, which states that the most likely location of the drawbridge shown is North Beach.

Chapter 11 of the book gives a good impression of the difficult conditions for the supply service.

The mule carts are left behind, while the wheels are transported away with the mules.

The commander-in-chief during the Gallipoli campaign, Sir Ian Hamilton, writes in a letter of 27 September

1915 to the Chief of the Indian Army [17](#)) that *the Indore Transport Corps* and *the Baratspore Transport Corps* have rendered excellent service. The general ends his letter by expressing the hope that the army chief will pass on the praise to the right person. (Source 15)



French General Maurice Sarrail [18](#)), with *Indian soldiers in the background, Salonika, 1917.*

Reproduced from a contemporary, colored Italian postcard.

The back of the card may indicate that the photograph was taken on 30 June 1917.

Macedonia 1915-1918

It appears that General Sarrail is decorated with a St. Order of George. However, I have not been able to clarify whether it is an English, Russian or Greek order.

In any case, it is the very indistinct soldiers in the background that are of interest here, as the only Indian soldiers on this front until September 1918, as far as I know, were the *3rd Mule Corps* [19](#)) and *the Baratspore Transport Corps*. If the caption [fits](#), then it must be soldiers from these units appearing in the background.



A multinational force, Salonika, 1917 [20](#)).

The following nations are represented (back row, from left): French Indochina (Annamite archer), France, Senegal, England, Russia, Italy (Alpini) and Serbia (behind the Indian soldier).

In the front row, a soldier from Greece (Crete), India and England is seen.

There even appears to be another soldier on the far right; where he comes from, history reports nothing about.

Considering the dating of the photograph, the Indian officer is assumed to be from one of the two training units, but a closer identification has not been possible.

Sources

1. *India's Army* of Donovan Jackson, Purnell and Sons, London 1940.
2. *Armies of India* by Major AC Lovett (illustrations) and Major GF MacMunn (text.), Adam and Charles Black, London 1911
3. *The Army of India and Its Evolution* - An official report published in Calcutta 1924 and reprinted by Picton Publishing, Chippenham/Wiltshire 1992, ISBN 0-948251-69-9.
4. *Player's cigaretkortserie* Military Uniforms of the British Empire Overseas, 1938.
5. *Horses and Saddlery* by Major G. Tylden, JA Allen & Company in association with the Army Museums Ogilby Trust, London 1965 (1980 reprint).
6. *Field Service Pocket Book (1914)*, published by the General Staff, War Office, London 1914, Reprint af David & Charles Reprints, London 1971, ISBN 0-7153-5225-3.
7. *The Indian Corps in France* by Lieutenant-Colonel Merewether and Sir Frederick Smith; original published December 1917, and reprinted by Naval & Military Press, London in 2001, ISBN 1-84342-38-4.
8. *Army Service Corps 1902-1918* af Michael Young, Leo Cooper, London 2000, ISBN 085052-730-9. See review.
9. *The Turn of the Wheel - The History of the RASC 1919-1939* af Pat Turpin, Barracuda Books Limited, Buckingham, England 1988, ISBN 0-86023-428-2.
10. *From Horse to Helicopter - Transporting the British Army in War and Peace 1648-1989* af John Sutton and John Walker, Leo Cooper, London 1990, ISBN 0-85052-724-4.
11. *Sepoys in the Trenches - The Indian Corps on the Western Front 1914-1915* af Gordon Corrigan, Spelmount Limited, Staplehurst, Kent 1999, ISBN 1-86227-054-6.
12. *Indian Cavalry Officer 1914-15* af Roly Grimshaw, D.J. Costello (Publishers) Ltd., Tunbridge Wells, Kent, 1986, ISBN 0-7104-3027-2.
13. *A Brief Record of The Advance of The Egyptian Expeditionary Force, July 1917 to October 1918*, udgivet af The Palestine News, Cairo 1919.
14. *The Indian Army 1914-1947* af Ian Summer, Osprey Elite 72, London 2001, ISBN 1-84176-196-6.
15. [Indian Mule Cart Transport Corps at Gallipoli](#), fra Digger History.
16. Brighton Beach og The Last of Anzac - Overlooking North Beach at Walker's Ridge fra Visit Gallipoli and the Anzac Commemorative Site.
17. The New Zealanders at Gallipoli af Fred Waite, Whitcombe and Tombs, Auckland/ New Zealand 1919 (New Zealand Electronic Text Centre).
18. Mysore Imperial Service Troops Memorial, Bangalore, India (Ronnie Johnson).

Closing

In the course of writing this article, I have seen a mention of a number of books - *The Armies of the Indian Princely States* by Richard Head and Tony McClenaghan - which can certainly make up for the lack of information about these armies [21](#)). I have not had the opportunity to see the books, but reviews suggest that they are quite extensive.

The Victoria and Albert Museum in London, has a large collection of photographs - Lafayette Negative

Collection - which shows many of the local regents - see e.g. the mention of His Highness Tukoji Rao Holkar, Maharaja of Indore (1890-1978).



Division mark

17th Indian Infantry Division (The "Black Cats").

Fra 17th Indian Infantry Division (Burma Star Association).

Four Mule Companies of the Royal Indian Army Service Corps were sent to France in the winter of 1939-40. The 22nd Company were taken as prisoners of war, while the remainder came to Wales after the withdrawal from France [22](#).

However, it was in Southeast Asia that the mule companies in particular came to their full potential. See 17th Indian Infantry Division (Burma Star Association), in which i.a. 50th Gwalior Pony Company (Indian State Forces) entered. 3rd See also The Indian State Forces on September 1939.

Per Finsted

To note:

1) A *conductor* was an "officiant" (warrant *officers*) within the supply service and munitions management of the Indian Army. See Glossary for family history researchers (The British Library).

2) Source 6 lists the capacity in *maunds*, a traditional Indian and Southeast Asian unit of weight. 1 *maund* equals 37.3242 British pounds. Here, 1 *maund* is set to 40 kg. See How Many? A Dictionary of Units of Measurement. (Russ Rowlett) The capacity is the official one; in practice, animals and humans can of course carry more, but not necessarily for a long time.

3) March speed in whole numbers. For comparison - the pedestrian's marching speed to 2.5 miles per hour, including short breaks.

4) Fra *Discovering Horse Drawn Transport of the British Army* af D.J. Smith, Shire Publications Ltd., Aylesbury/Bucks. 1977, ISBN 0-85263-403-X.

5) From World War I casualties of Indian Forces commemorated in France (SikhSpectrum.com), which mentions two fallen - Driver, 1305 Sirdar, 9th Mule Corps (died 11 March 1915) and Driver, 987 Bhagat Singh, 23rd Mule Corps (died 10 December 1914).

6) The train wagon could be the same one shown in my article The Indian Army 1910-1940 - About the Infantry, Part 2.

7) Identified using the extensive collection of postcards found on the website Orléans Jadis.

8) See What is the difference between alm. slaughter and halal slaughter? (Netprofessor.dk)

9) General Sir James Willcocks (1857-1926) (Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives).

10) Sir Pertab Singh (1844-1922) (Wikipedia). See also Sir Pertab Singh (National Portrait Gallery), showing Sir Pertab's 16-year-old nephew and heir, Shri Sumair Singhji Sahib Bahadur (1898-1918), who accompanied him in the field.

11) If you want a taste of this, see the recipe Chapati, Indian Bread (Mamta's Kitchen).

12) See Indian soldier's daily ration 1914 (Great War Forum).

13) About the campaign in Palestine - see my article General Sir Edmund Allenby's joint operations in Palestine, 1917-1918. Source 13's strength overview per September 1918 is also reproduced here: Order-of-Battle of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, September 1918 (James Hanafin).

14) See my article The Road to Basra, 1914, from which the overview originates. An overview of the division's organization at Kut in December 1915 mentions that at this time it included e.g. the following supply units, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel ASR Annesley, in the division: *Jaipur Transport Corps* and the *13th, 21st, 26th and 30th Mule Corps*. See 8363 Private William Wilby (Stephen Stratford). See also Mesopotamian Campaign (Wikipedia) for a mention of the siege of Kut.

15) On the battles at Shaiba, see The Battle of Shaiba, 1915 (FirstWorldWar.com).

16) Reproduced from *The Long Road to Baghdad* by Edmund Candler, Cassell and Company Limited, London 1919, which has been seen for sale on the Internet (eBay).

17) General Beauchamp Duff (1855-1918) (Liddell Hart Centre); Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army from 1913-1916, when he was succeeded by General Sir Charles Monro (1860-1929) (FirstWorldWar.com). Contributing to General Duff's departure was the ineffective supply service in Mesopotamia. In October 1915, General Monro succeeded Sir Ian Hamilton as Commander-in-Chief at Gallipoli, and was responsible for the most successful part of that campaign - the withdrawal - an efficiency which was also reflected in his role as Commander-in-Chief in India. (Source 14)

18) General Maurice Sarrail (1856-1929) (FirstWorldWar.com) was commander of the French forces in Macedonia from October 1915. From January 1916 to December 1917 he was commander-in-chief of the Allied forces in Macedonia.

19) The Great War Forum mentions Driver, 1360 Husain Bakhsh, 3rd Mule Corps (died 15 March 1916).

20) From *The Story of The Salonica Army* by G. Ward Price, Edward J. Clode, New York, 1918 (World War 1 Document Archive). Chapter 16 of the book gives a good impression of the difficult conditions that characterized this campaign, not least in terms of supplies.

21) See Indian Military History (Military Press). There are currently published 6 books in the series, which was to be a total of 21 books.

22) See my article Britain's Figures - Royal Indian Army Service Corps. On the units' stay in Wales, see The Royal Indian Army's flying visit by Giovanna Bloor (BBC North West Wales History).