

The Forgotten Indian Connection: Australian Soldiers of the Raj: 1919-1939

In the rush to claim a relationship with Asia, military imperial connections are easily forgotten. Prior to Indian Independence in 1947, India and Australia were subordinate partners in the British empire, and this framework fostered the existence of a small but significant military relationship. While a small number of Australians either independently saw service in India or were posted to the Indian Army Staff College at Quetta, a larger cohort of Australia soldiers with Indian connections exists. In the interwar period, it was standard practice on graduation for officers in the full time Australian Army to serve in India with a British unit prior to returning to Australia and service in a part time unit, a policy dictated by an inter war Australian defence policy that dismissed the need for a standing army. It is ironic that at a time of White Australia and apparent mono – culturalism that as a group, the majority of full time officers to be commissioned in the Australian Army had served in Asia. This degree of exposure to Asian society is unlikely to ever be repeated. This paper will explore themes and detail individual case studies of this facet of Australian military engagement with imperial India.

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