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Journal of Modern Italian Studies

ISSN: 1354-571X (Print) 1469-9583 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rmis20

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To cite this article: Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi & Alvaro Tacchini (02 Jul 2025): Indian troops in the liberation of Italy: Memory and memorialization in the Upper Tiber Valley, Journal of Modern Italian Studies, DOI: 10.1080/1354571X.2025.2500834

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2025.2500834

Published online: 02 Jul 2025.

JOURNAL OF MODERN ITALIAN STUDIES
https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2025.2500834

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Indian troops in the liberation of Italy: Memory and memorialization in the Upper Tiber Valley

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ABSTRACT

The article uses the case of Montone, a small town in the Upper Tiber Valley, to bring into focus the contribution of colonial Indian troops in the liberation of Italy during the Second World War. By recounting the battles that took place in Montone and surrounding areas in the summer of 1944, and by addressing the prominent role played by the British Indian Army in the conflict, the article raises questions about the historical memory of colonial troops and their erasure from the Italians' imaginary. The article contextualizes this historical conundrum within the geopolitics of empire in its modern manifestations of colonialism and imperialism. It highlights the intersection of local history with the broader global context and utilizes a granular military analysis to shed light onto the less-known actors that participated in Italy's liberation in 1943–1945. By demystifying taken-for-granted beliefs on the role of victors and victims in the fight against the Germans, the article ultimately exposes the unforeseen ways in which memory and memorialization unfolded in Italy in the aftermath of the Second World War.

RIASSUNTO

Questo articolo utilizza il caso di Montone, un paese nell'Alta Valle Tiberina, per mettere in luce il contributo delle truppe coloniali alla liberazione dell'Italia durante la seconda guerra mondiale. Nel dirigere l'attenzione alle battaglie che occorsero a Montone e luoghi circostanti nell'estate del 1944, e esponendo il ruolo prominente svolto dall'Esercito Anglo-Indiano in quei conflitti, l'articolo solleva interrogativi sulla memoria storica delle truppe coloniali e la loro relativa scomparsa dall'immaginario degli italiani. Gli autori spiegano questo apparente enigma con riferimento alla geopolitica di impero nelle sue manifestazioni moderne di colonialismo e imperialismo e pongono cosi' in rilievo l'intersecazione tra storia locale e il piu' ampio contesto globale. Sulla base di un'analisi granulare degli aspetti militari delle battaglie occorse nella zona, l'articolo rende visibili agenti storici meno noti che parteciparono alla liberazione dell'Italia dal 1943 al 1945, smitizza credenze presunte sul ruolo di vincitori e vittime nella lotta contro i tedeschi, e mette fondamentalmente in evidenza lo svolgimento imprevisto di memoria e memorializzazione della seconda guerra mondiale in Italia.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received: 29 Nov 2024; Revised: 12 Apr 2025; Accepted: 29 Apr 2025

KEYWORDS Second World War; Indian troops; Italy; memory; memorialization

PAROLE CHIAVE Seconda guerra mondiale; truppe indiane; Italia; memoria; memorializzazione

In perpetual gratitude to the soldiers of the 4th and 10th Indian Divisions who sacrificed their lives to free the Upper Tiber Valley from Nazi-fascism in the summer of 1944.

In memory of the Indian Marhata soldier Yeshwant Ghadge, decorated with the Victoria Cross, who died fighting valiantly on these heights.

In memory of all the soldiers who died in this valley, of the partisans fallen for freedom and of the civilian victims, so that the spirit of brotherhood regained with the Liberation from Nazi-fascism may always guide the path of peoples in centuries to come.

The text of the epigraph above accompanies a war memorial recently erected in Montone, a small medieval town in the Umbria region. Inaugurated in July 2023 with an original sundial design, the memorial acknowledges the soldiers and civilians who died during the campaign for liberation in the Upper Tiber Valley seventy-nine years earlier (see Figure 1). More poignantly, the monument is dedicated to the Indian divisions (4th and 10th) that, on their march up the peninsula as an integral part of the British Army, pushed the

Figure 1

Germans out of the northern Umbrian territory in July 1944, thus ending the occupation of Montone and surrounding villages. Rarely acknowledged, the 'liberators' in the Upper Tiber Valley (and other areas in Italy as well) were predominantly colonial subjects from the Raj.[1] Contrary to popularized images of British and American soldiers parading into newly freed cities, Gurkha, Punjabi, Baluchi, Mahratta, and Sikh constituted the bulk of the Allied forces that reestablished Italian authority in Montone and other Upper Tiber Valley locations, including Città di Castello and Monte Santa Maria Tiberina. Documented with precision by historical sources reporting on the 'campaign in Italy' (Prasad 1960) and despite the thousands of South Asians laid to rest (whether buried or cremated) in military cemeteries throughout the peninsula, the centrality of Indian troops in the Liberation struggle has not entered the imaginary space of Italians' memory, be it official or unofficial.

Not unique to Italy, failure to recognize the role of Indian combatants in the fight against Nazi-fascism reflects the dominant tendency in historical records and commemorative celebrations of the Second World War to bypass the contribution of colonial troops (Storm and al-Tuma eds. 2016).[2] Criticisms of recent remembrance ceremonies at Dunkirk – reproached for passing over in silence the almost 300 Indian soldiers that were part of the epic evacuation of Allied forces from the Northern coast of France – have helped highlight the absence of British Indian Army in narratives of the world conflict (Bowman 2020; Bayly and Harper 2005).[3] Considering that by the end of the war in 1945 the Indian Army counted upward of 2.5 million volunteer forces, the largest in the world, their long-standing invisibility is all the more remarkable. To complicate matters further, in India knowledge of the Indian Army's participation in the Second World War has remained buried for decades due to the sensitive nature of the country's historical relationship with its British colonial ruler.[4] The daunting question confronting official histories in post-partition India has been: Why did the colonized fight alongside their tyrants?

In this article we propose that the liberation story of what appears to be a delimited and little-known area of Central Italy – the Upper Tiber Valley – and the scarcely acknowledged role of the Indian troops in it, can be read within a larger historical framework that considers the geo-political context of empire in its modern manifestations of colonialism and imperialism (Steinmetz 2014). Through the intersection of local history with broader world developments and events, and by exposing the invisible status of the 4th and 10th Indian infantry divisions in the Italian campaign (the 8th division and the 43rd Independent Gurkha Infantry Brigade were also part of the campaign), the article uses the case of Montone to address questions of the erasure and failed historical memory of colonial troops in the Second World War. The article first contextualizes the impact of the world conflict

on the Raj. It presents a brief overview of the Indian Army's composition and organization and gauges its military preparedness and eventual impact in the Italian campaign. After tracing the movement of Indian forces on the world map and locating their specific presence in Italy from the time of the Allied landing in Sicily during the summer of 1943 to the end of the war in early May 1945, the article zeroes in on the events surrounding the liberation of Montone and other localities in the Upper Tiber Valley. It details at the granular level the actions taken by the Allied forces to displace the Germans from the territory, and recounts the role of specific protagonists in the fight for dominance over the area. The article concludes by discussing the recent monument inaugurated in Montone as an acknowledgment of the distorted past and a sign of the will to correct the partiality of conventional historical accounts.

1.

'This country is at war with Germany,' Great Britain's prime minister Neville Chamberlain announced on a BBC radio broadcast on September 3, 1939, two days after the Germans' invasion of Poland. Within a few hours, and without consulting any local authorities, the viceroy of British India, Lord Linlithgow, committed the colonial territory and its Indian Army to the military effort on behalf of the empire. In an apparent repeat of the First World War, and amidst the population's shocked reception, the whole Indian subcontinent was catapulted into a faraway conflict engulfed in European logic and interests (Khan 2015). The largest government employer in colonial India – composed of volunteer rank and file Indians in addition to British officers – the Indian Army had originally been conceived for waging defensive battles and ensuring security within the confines of the colony. In actuality, it offered Britain an imperial reserve of over one million troops, a reserve that proved critical during the Great War and was expected to play a similarly positive role in the Second World War (Roy 2012, 1; Khan 2015, xi).

An offshoot of the English East India Company's private armed forces nationalized by the British government in 1858, the Indian Army underwent several transformations in the decades before the Great War. By the early 1900s, the original East India Company's recruitment practices – based on dividing recruits among three presidency armies – was fully replaced by a centralized organization.[5] The army's shift of emphasis to the northern regions, and particularly the Punjab, for purposes of enlistment remained however a partial legacy of the East India Company's late restructuring, a preference that was based on a theory of 'martial races' according to which ethnic groups from southern India (but also Bengal) were not suitable for armed services.[6] A set of preconceptions based on a biological, fixed view of race led to privilege northern Indians, who were taller and stronger, and

lighter skinned too (Roy 2021; Barkawi 2017).[7] In addition to physical features, recruits were classified depending on whether they hailed from urban areas (not acceptable) or the countryside (acceptable) (Roy 2021, 89).[8] Caste, which had been the determinant factor for selection before 1857, continued to be part of evaluative criteria, but in a less central manner. The high-caste Brahmins and Rajputs that filled the army in the past were superseded by Punjabis, including Sikhs and Muslims (who had a history of martial traditions). Due to their alleged masculine features, and in a constructed association that linked race markers to cultural characteristics such as courage and fierceness, Punjabis were considered master combatants well predisposed to warfare and ideally fit for battle. In the same vein, and following the same mythical concept of manliness, Gurkhas from Nepal were regarded as valiant warriors and included in the martial races.[9] During the First World War, close to half soldiers in the Indian Army came from Punjab, while 200,000 Gurkhas served out of an overall Nepalese male population of 907,000. The Raj administration used promises of reform and land grants to cultivate support and increase recruitment among the colonized. Even though the British failed to deliver on their agreements, loyalty to the army continued to be steady after the war. More than two million Indians (including non-combatants) served during the Second World War, with Punjabi and Nepalese once again constituting the majority of all recruits (Roy 2021).[10]

Several historians cite the principle of divide and rule as central to the British organization of the Indian Army. A classic strategy based on discouraging alliances that could challenge the legitimacy of existing power relations, the technique of divide and rule, variously adopted by rulers since ancient times, was applied by the Raj in conjunction with the newly acquired knowledge provided by colonial anthropology. At the end of the nineteenth century, the study of Indian populations conducted by British researchers resulted in the ordering of local groups based on categorizations that, later elaborated by the government, morphed into officially constructed ethnic identities. On the basis of this redrawn mapping, and taking into account martial race theory, the Indian Army opted for an internal organization of recruits that separated them into individual units along ethnic and linguistic lines. Accordingly, each company within a battalion was exclusively composed of one type (such as Sikh) on the premise that specific customs and habits differentiated a unit from others in the same battalion. Uniformity within and diversity across companies supposedly guaranteed against the risk of pan-ethnic solidarity.

The British meticulously implemented a policy that honored the cultural requirements of each ethnic class and covered every single aspect of a soldier's routines and beliefs, including ways of dressing, food, and religious rituals. Rules were consistently and rigidly enforced, though on the basis of a principled and selective understanding of ethnic identity that favored one

interpretation over others. A classic case in point is that of the Sikhs. Historically developed from a multitude of tribes, in addition to Sikhism being a syncretic religion, the Sikhs could not be easily captured within one single definition. And yet the British subscribed to an ideal understanding of them that even guided army regulations about their uniforms. Thus, the turban (and one particular type of it) was among the obligatory pieces of garment that military authorities prescribed for Sikh soldiers, while hair or beard trimming were considered an infringement of rules and subject to punitive measures (Barkawi 2017).

Organizationally, the Indian Army featured native officers (Viceroy Commissioned Officers [V.C.O.s]) at the head of individual companies. V.C.O.s, who tended to share the characteristics of their specific unit, were in charge of enforcing rules and worked as liaisons between the Indian platoons and the British officers. Until the First World War, only British officers served as company commanders in order to avoid any chance of Indians holding a superior position over their colonizers (Marston 2014, chapter 1). After the Great War, however, a slow Indianization of the army's officer corps began, though amidst many difficulties and contentions. At the start of the Second World War, the need to expand the Indian Army in the face of an ever-escalating global conflict greatly eased the push to promote Indian officers to higher ranks – a development that accompanied other initiatives seemingly aimed at valorizing the military potential of the colonized.[11] Thus, recruitment of rank and file was opened up to include ethnic groups beyond the classical martial races, and several units were reallocated from their non-active service to more critical combat roles.

The Indian Army did not rely on conscription for purposes of enlisting – joining was a voluntary decision. However, the army targeted specific communities with the goal of ensuring a reliable source of recruits. While it eventually settled on the 'martial races' as ideal enlistees, the army shifted its definition of that preferred category and at times applied it to different groups, showing a degree of flexibility in its mobilization strategies and tactics. During the last years of the Second World War, then Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, Field Marshal Claude Auchinleck, expanded recruitment to Hindu groups, including the Mahrattas, who were consequently designated as members of the martial races (Roy 2021, 99). Although the Indian Army was initially weakened by the fast pace of these organizational changes and suffered early losses (but a few victories too), it eventually came to play a decisive role in defeating the Axis in North Africa in 1943 and in ensuring the success of the 1943–45 Italian campaign. It also stopped the triumphal march of the Japanese during the Burma campaign of 1944–45.

The victories of the Indian Army were substantial and came in spite of major structural and cultural idiosyncrasies that plagued the institution, including motivation. While scholarship on military history suggests that

ideals (particularly nationalism) play a large role in an army's willingness to fight, in the case of India, the question arises: what did the war mean to the millions of men who fought on behalf of Britain? How did they relate to the idea of combating the fascist threat? We know that British imperial authorities made little to no effort to appraise their subjects on the merits of the antifascist cause, believing it was a self-evident matter. Britain also seemingly ignored that rising demands for independence, such as in the 'Quit India' movement launched by Gandhi in 1942, clashed with the empire's expectation that the colonized fight on its behalf, especially when no guarantees of a tangible return were given in exchange for participation.[12] We also know that opposition to joining the conflict animated the civilian population. Food shortages and skyrocketing prices contributed to Indians' negative perspectives on the war, while imposition of the 'War Fund' created resentment among them. (A type of semi-voluntary tax that required colonial subjects to make financial contributions, the fund was used as a discriminatory device for dispensing favors.) Matters get even more complicated once we consider South Asians' relationship to fascism, as Hitler and Mussolini had several admirers, particularly among Hindu groups, while left-wing members of the Indian Congress Party aligned with the international movement that opposed the European dictatorships.[13] Overall, the Indian Army appears to have lacked a unified ideal that, according to the literature (McPherson 1998; Bartov 1992), would guarantee a soldier's fighting spirit.

Critics of military historians on the question of combat motivation claim that their approach is grounded in a Eurocentric understanding of the army as connected to the nation, a model that obviously did not apply to colonial India (Barkawi 2006). Focusing on the institutional features of the army, rather than ideology, might offer better clues for explaining the accomplishments of the Indian Army. In particular, military culture cut through the myriad differences that separated recruits across units and battalions by molding each enlistee into soldiers fully subscribed to their military identity and trained to perform their duties in modern organized warfare (Barkawi 2006). For some scholars, indeed, the Indian Army came into being as a modern, professional military through the trials and tribulations of the Second World War (Jeffries 2019). Against all odds, and in the face of organizational limitations imposed by colonial logic, the Indian Army showed remarkable ability to adapt at the time of the war. Once the conflict ended, the army's pursuit of full Indianization signaled the coming into being of an independent force that proved its effectiveness on the battlefield and could now stand on its own. Unsurprisingly, the unraveling of the empire followed. Amidst a rising nationalist movement, the war became the instigator for decolonization in British India.[14]

Military records indicate that during the Second World War the Indian Army performed very successfully across geographically disparate war

theaters, including North Africa and Burma. In the particular case of the Italian campaign, the first units of the Indian Army landed in Sicily in July 1943, quickly moving on to the mainland where the fight of the Allied forces against Germans and fascists proved to be much more challenging (Prasad 1960; Graham and Bidwell 1986; Field Marshal Lord Carver 2001). In September 1943, the 8th Indian division landed in Puglia. It advanced to the Sangro River area a couple of months later, only to be stuck in that position for the entire winter. Meanwhile, the 4th Indian division reached the Adriatic coast in December 1943 eventually joining the US Fifth Army in the fight for Cassino in February 1944. After a series of failed attacks and prolonged stalemates at Cassino, the 4th division briefly returned to the Adriatic sector. The 8th division replaced it in the fourth and final successful battle for Cassino in early May, following which both the 4th and 8th divisions continued to advance towards Rome and helped liberate the city on June 4. The two divisions then moved north towards Perugia where the next German defense line was located. As for the 10th Indian division, it was deployed on the Adriatic side of the peninsula in March 1944. In June, it was ordered to relieve the 8th division in the fighting around Perugia. Together with the 4th division, it made gains into the Upper Tiber Valley through early August.[15]

2.

The Upper Tiber Valley extends for approximately 60 km from its northern end, where the river flows into the plain. It is a narrow and fertile valley, crossed by numerous tributaries of the Tiber and surrounded by Apennine hills rising between Umbria and Marche, on the eastern side, and between Umbria and Tuscany, on the western side. This type of landscape offered the Germans important defensive opportunities very near the Gothic Line (a bulwark they were erecting on the Apennines against the Allied offensive). It provided an ideal terrain from which to slow down the enemy advance and gain time to complete the fortifications further north. The retreating German troops could benefit from the constant succession of ridges and waterways, ancient hillside villages, towers and fortified medieval rural centers perched on the heights, and flat areas thickly dotted with peasant houses, cultivated fields, fruit trees and dense vegetation along the waterways. Although this area constituted a difficult territory for tanks, its roads could be easily blocked by demolishing bridges in strategic locations. Furthermore, the area could be reduced to a minefield, creating further difficulties for the pressing enemy.

In this valley, the Allied 8th Army, which was positioned between Toscana, Umbria, and Marche, tasked its 10th Army Corps with carrying out the offensive. The corps consisted of two Indian divisions, the 4th and the 10th. The 4th was deployed to the west of the Tiber, the 10th to the east. The original objective was to put under pressure the Germans in order to further the Allied advance

to the north. The German defense lines, in turn, relied on two regiments of the 114th Jäger Division east of the Tiber and three regiments of the 44th Infantry Division to the west. Montone, a medieval hilltop village in a dominant position over the surrounding plain, was the first important defensive bastion for the Germans in the valley. Meanwhile, on the east side, in Val di Chiana, the 6th South-African Armed division was headed towards Arezzo together with the 2nd New Zealand division and the 4th US Infantry division; on the West, towards the Adriatic Sea on the Marche front, the 2nd Polish corps was advancing along with the Italian Liberation corps and groups of partisans from Abruzzi. The Fifth US Army was positioned along the Tyrrhenian coast.

In the two months of war in the Upper Tiber Valley, the Indian divisions deployed five infantry brigades and several other units that supported their advance (for a total of approximately 20,000 soldiers).[16] One of the three battalions that made up each brigade was British. In the 20th and 25th brigades, which fought in the Montone territory, the British units were respectively the 8th battalion of the Manchester Regiment and the 1st battalion of the King's Own Royal Regiment. The Indian battalions of the two brigades were the 3/5th Mahratta, the 23rd Gurkha Rifles, the 3/18th Garhwal and the 3/1st Punjab. Therefore, approximately two thirds of the infantry troops were made up of soldiers from the British colonies in the Far East. The Gurkhas of Nepal formed four battalions; the soldiers from Balochistan two; other battalions enlisted soldiers from Maharashtra in western India, Uttarakhand in northern India, Punjab, and Rajputana, a historic region in northwestern India. The Sikhs, coming from Punjab, but with their own ethnic and religious specificity, were mostly combined in their own battalion. Military personnel from other territories of the British Raj belonged to medical and other units, including engineers' corps recruited from Bombay to Madras. In addition to British and Indian military personnel, the 10th Army Corps also benefited from the support of Canadian engineers, African muleteers, and South African and U.S. pilots. As for senior command roles – battalion commander and above – they were the prerogative of British officers. Very few Indian officers held the rank of major and captain in the brigades that fought in the valley.

The Germans, who were experiencing delays in fortifying the Gothic Line, required their troops to resist tenaciously in the Upper Tiber Valley and took advantage of the morphology of the territory to compensate for their numerical inferiority. They adopted flexible defense tactics, retreating when their positions appeared indefensible, but continually counter-attacking to make it difficult for the enemy to consolidate the conquered ground. They relied on the agility of units trained to move autonomously and counted on the strong and continuous support of their artillery. The battalion war diaries of the Indian divisions almost daily highlight the

intensity and effectiveness of the barrage of German cannons and mortars. Furthermore, the German sappers carried out widespread and systematic demolitions to leave behind scorched earth, effectively transforming a large part of the valley into a minefield.

To give the Germans no respite, the Indian divisions frequently rotated battalions so as to have a continuous supply of rested troops. Like the Germans, they were able to seize the opportunities offered by a mostly hilly, wooded, and rugged environment. In some circumstances, surprise attacks (mostly at night) proved decisive to catch the enemy unprepared and nullify the defensive advantages they enjoyed. This is what unfolded when conquering the German defensive stronghold of Montone. The 10th Indian Division diverted the enemy's attention with a secondary attack from the valley, while the decisive assault was launched from behind, bypassing the German lines with a long night march through the hills. Along the axis of the 10th Indian Division, the surprise effect would also prove decisive in the battle of Città di Castello. Allied tanks successfully climbed a ridge east of the city. Believing it not vulnerable to attack, the Germans defended it inadequately (Prasad with Pal eds. 1960; *3rd King's Own Hussars War Diary*).

The war operations of the 10th Indian Division took place in the valley from 3 July through the first half of September; in the case of 4th Indian Division, from about 8 July to 20 July. By cross-referencing the information from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission database with the reports from the battalions' war diaries, we can ascertain that the total number of infantry soldiers killed was 515; among them, 364 were Indian (70.7 per cent). Adding the fallen soldiers of the armored units, the total rises to 544. Of these, 374 (68.7 per cent) belonged to the colonial troops, 170 (31.3 per cent) were British. In detail, the Gurkha battalions of the two divisions lost 140 men, the Punjabi battalions forty-four. Furthermore, seventy-seven soldiers of the Mahrattas were killed, the Baloch forty-six, the Garhwali twenty-seven, and the Sikhs twenty-five. It is also possible to quantify the exact number of Anglo-Indian casualties in military operations east of the Tiber, between the battle of Montone and the liberation of Città di Castello (6–22 July). The 10th Indian Division counted 110 fallen soldiers: 74.5 per cent of them were colonials. The average age of Indian fallen soldiers was twenty-four, two years younger than the British. It reached about twenty-five years or a little more among the Garhwalis and Sikhs, while it was less than twenty-three years among the Gurkhas. Twenty-four out of 74 Mahrattas and fifteen out of twenty-nine Garhwalis were married, while only seven Gurkhas, four Punjabis, one Baloch and no Sikhs had married before leaving for war.

Numerical information points to the fundamental role played by the Indians in the battles that liberated the Upper Tiber Valley from the Germans. The decorations awarded to the soldiers of the Indian divisions especially testify to the importance of their actions in this phase of the war.[17] Overall, the infantry troops

and armored corps received at least eighty-one awards for military valor, evenly granted to the 4th and 10th divisions.[18] Their distribution essentially reflects the proportion between colonial and British soldiers, with nearly 69 per cent and 31 per cent awards respectively. The four Gurkha battalions of the two divisions received the highest number of awards: thirty-five. The most prestigious decoration was awarded to the Mahratta Yeshwant Ghadge, Victoria Cross posthumously. He died heroically on the hills north of Montone on 10 July 1944, when attacking the German machine gun positions. He was twenty-three years old and married. Until September 2019, Yeshwant Ghadge was believed to be 'missing, without a known grave,' because his body had not been found. Lacking a burial place, he was commemorated on the Cassino Memorial. A document resurfaced in the archives of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission has, however, revealed the exhumation of his body on 25 October 1945 and cremation at the Arezzo War Cemetery (Bei and Tacchini 2021). The image of Ghadge has now become an iconic representation of the British war efforts. It appears prominently along with three others on the main page of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website and is featured in the promotional material for the commemorations of the Second World War organized in India.

3.

For the population of the Upper Tiber Valley, the sudden presence of a huge mass of foreign soldiers (between 30,000 and 40,000 if we include the Germans) represented a new experience. The economy of this Apennine territory far from the national industrial and cultural centers was based on agricultural activities still essentially aimed at self-consumption and foreigners very rarely visited this area for tourism, culture, or trade. The image of 'foreigners' common among the locals was strongly conditioned by the stereotypes learned in primary school. Only a few people knew about India and the Far East. In the urban context, some ideas of the so-called 'British India' – with all its load of exotic scenarios and clichés – circulated through illustrated magazines and popular literature, especially the books of Emilio Salgari. The population, in sum, was not acquainted with the history, culture, religion, and customs of the thousands of soldiers from the British colonies who came to fight on its territory.

To the locals, the most immediate and striking aspect of the Indians was their being 'coloured.' Nazi-fascist propaganda against the Allies had not hesitated to resort to vivid racist expressions. The municipal archive in Città di Castello conserves fliers and posters that circulated at the time warning of 'negro' invaders depicted as animal-like plunderers and brute rapists. One German leaflet denounced: 'Thousands of women and young girls are violated by niggers and Moroccans.' A poster of the Italian Social Republic (R.S.I.)

showed a black soldier seizing a white woman and counseled: 'Defend her! She could be your mother, your wife, your sister, your daughter.' In the images spread by the fascist regime, black soldiers wore the American uniform, but Italians being presented with such stereotypes could inevitably extend them to soldiers of colour of other nationalities.[19]

Certainly, the 'difference' of the Indian soldiers – their appearance, their customs, and religious practices – aroused curiosity among the people of the Upper Tiber Valley, even though in the collective memory respect for the 'liberators' did not draw distinctions between British and colonial troops. After their liberation, the town of Città di Castello and other valley localities served as rear base for the reorganization of the Allied battalions before their return to the front. For a few days, the local population was able to be in direct contact with the Indians and observe them. They saw them play volleyball in the main piazza (after removing their headcovers and tying their hair with colorful ribbons), or sitting in a circle and playing their traditional instruments and dancing around the fire, or entering barefoot into a place of cult they had set up in an old building. Residents were struck by the warmth Indians showed towards children with whom they shared food and sweets (Tacchini 2015).

As an evacuee, school teacher Teodorico Forconi lived near one of the Indians' camps, in the village of San Secondo, not far from Montone. He appreciated their 'discipline, respect and politeness,' their care for personal hygiene and clothing, and their industriousness (Forconi 2010, 233). He was fascinated by the contrast between the evening dirges and religious songs and the distant echo of cannon shots. On 24 July 1944, he wrote in his diary: 'The Indians are still here. They cleaned everything before leaving, they left nothing, they didn't steal anything.' He further noted: 'The Indians are extraordinary, they have a feline agility, they are strong, resistant; they go on foot, on horseback, on motorbike; they drive cars; they work as carpenters, as mechanics, they make roads, they build bridges, they are very religious, they fight well and die disciplined. They speak Italian well; they greet graciously and are offended if they are not treated well' (Forconi 2010, 235). Forconi's diary is the only one found so far that was written while the liberation events were happening.[20] It is, however, substantially in tune with written memoirs and numerous oral testimonies in the valley collected by local historians over the years (Tacchini 2015; Lignani and Mastriforti Romeggini 2003), including the testimonial of British corporal Albert Goodwin (Tacchini 2015). As for written memoirs, Giulio Pierangeli mentions at the end of August 1944 that 'the attitude of large part of the population towards the English troops, even coloured ones, was very cordial' (Lignani and Tacchini eds. 2003). More neutral comments on coloured troops appear in reports on the war written by local priests after the passage of the front (Minciotti 1978).

In the images taken by the Film Units of the 10th Indian Division, almost exclusively British soldiers can be seen parading or interacting with the population in the towns of the valley.[21] This is especially true in Umbertide, Montone, Città di Castello, and Anghiari, even if the filmic documentation also focuses on the colonial troops. Indeed, it was the images of the British 'liberators' that became deeply rooted in the local memory and contributed to overshadowing the notable contribution of the colonial troops. Part of the reason for this outcome can be ascribed to decisions taken following the immediate post-war period. A desire for redemption after the long period of fascist dictatorship led the refounded Italian democracy to place particular emphasis on the contribution offered to the Liberation by the partisan movement. The same phenomenon occurred in France, where focus on the natives' contribution to the final victory even led to ignore the role of colonial fighters in Resistance groups (Rives 1992; Maghraoui 1998. For an Italian case see Petracci 2020). Additionally, the price paid in every corner of the territory by the civilian population, caught in the middle of the fighting and victim of the hostility of the German invaders, left a strong mark on local communities. The fifteen municipalities that institutionally make up the Upper Tiber Valley suffered 822 civilian victims of the war. 200 people died from shelling, machine-gunning, and gunfire, 127 from Allied bombing, 224 from the explosion of mines and war remnants, and 157 were killed by the Germans. Moreover, 54 partisans died in combat or shot by the Nazi-fascists (Tacchini 2015). In this context, the memory of the war has centered above all on the Resistance and on the martyrdom of the population. One should also keep in mind that studies on specific military events have been sporadic, sometimes focused on very local areas, with even rarer attention to the conflict in the valley and the role played by the Indian divisions. In the end, although from a military point of view the liberation of the valley from Nazi-fascism was achieved by the two Indian divisions that defeated the Germans, this reality did not register in people's mind or in their memory, thus making the popular image of the 'liberators' partial, if not a construct.

The erection of the war memorial in the medieval town of Montone offers a much-needed corrective to the older view of the war events and their meaning in terms of the sacrifice of human lives. The memorial was proposed by the Institute of Political and Social History 'Venanzio Gabriotti' of Città di Castello after its president's extensive research on the role of Indian troops in the liberation of the valley. In February 2020, the Institute presented the project to the municipalities of Città di Castello, Montone, and Pietralunga. The three municipalities agreed to locate the memorial in Montone and involved the Indian embassy in Italy in its realization. All the expenses were sustained by the municipality of

Montone. With a panoramic view of the valley, the memorial is situated in piazza San Francesco and along the walkaway around the homonymous ex-monastery, where the Museum of Montone is currently located. A number of metal blocks (cippi) throughout the walkway function as optical guides for the visitor by directing the human eye to the exact places where the main war actions occurred. Tablets in bilingual texts accompany the blocks and narrate the events.

Reflecting new historical awareness, the memorial honors, in addition to the civilian victims and partisans killed in the Resistance, the fallen Anglo-Indians and the Mahratta hero Yeshwant Ghadge. Moreover, its sundial highlights the connections – ignored for decades – that unite together people, places, and times far apart from each other. Based on the idea that the sun represents the natural element shared by all humanity, the sundial features the Latin motto 'Omnes sub eodem sole' (We all live under the same sun) (Figure 2). While it marks local time, it also links Montone to the land from where the colonial troops originated. Thanks to an elaborate design and a complicated astronomical computation by architect Francesco Rosi, every day a shadow on the sundial is projected to show the noon hour at Ghadge's birthplace in Palasgaon, India. Furthermore, every year on the day that Ghadge died (10 July), a ray of light passes through the hole of the Victoria Cross he was awarded (inserted into the gnomon) and intersects with the line of 'memory' drawn in the lower part of the sundial. Ghadge is part of the valley's history, the memorial attests, and so are the Indian troops that fought alongside him during that terrible summer of 1944. Another

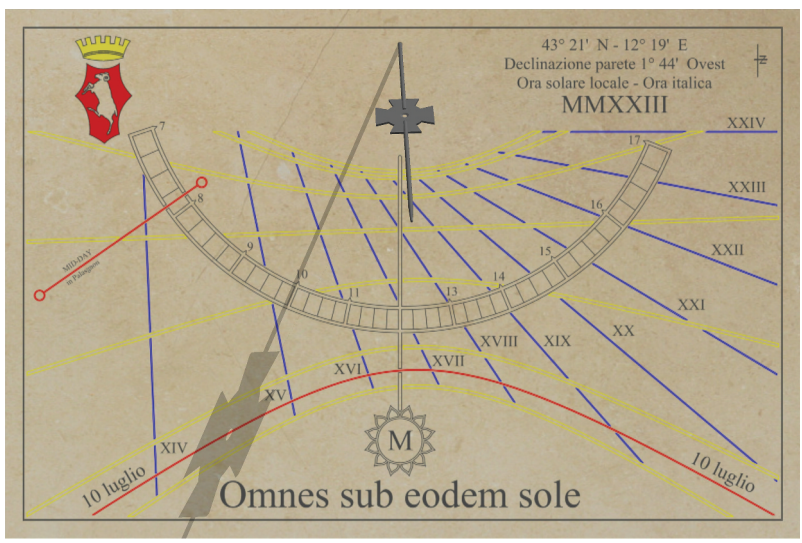

Figure 2

Second World War memorial is set to be erected in the ancient town of Monte Santa Maria Tiberina. Ideally connected to that of Montone – visible in the distance on the other side of the valley – it will specifically recall the battles fought by the 4th Indian Division in the mountainous territory west of the Tiber. Together, these two war memorials of the Upper Tiber Valley redefine the historical imaginary of the Second World War.

Through the micro lens of local history and a granular military analysis, and taking into account the broader context of imperialism, the case of the Upper Tiber Valley sheds light onto the less-known actors that participated in Italy's liberation in 1943–1945. It demystifies taken-for-granted beliefs on the role of victors and victims in the fight against the Germans and exposes the unforeseen ways in which memory and memorialization occurred in Italy in the aftermath of such a life-shattering event as the Second World War.

Notes

1. The Raj refers to British control over the Indian subcontinent between 1858 to 1947.
2. On France's colonial troops during the Second World War, estimated to be more than 500,000, see Jennings 2015.
3. Investigative journalism has highlighted a similar issue in France. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7984436.stm.
4. For a parallel case in colonial France see the story of Frantz Fanon. For a personal approach to remembrance in India see Karnad (2015).
5. The three presidencies were Bengal, Madras, and Bombay. There was also a Punjab Irregular Force (Marston 2014, chapter 1; Omissi 1994, 148–149).
6. The new emphasis had begun after the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and purposefully excluded groups involved in the mutiny (Yong 2018). People in the south and Bengal were deemed to be 'effeminate races.'
7. Other colonial powers also relied on martial race views for their selection of troops. On France and her 'tirailleurs' see Lunn (1999); for Italy's Eritrean Ascari see Chelati Dirar (2008).
8. Martial race theory also took into consideration local climate and environment.
9. According to Roy (2021, 89), Gurkha was a manufactured identity constructed by the Raj out of different ethnic groups in Nepal. British officers fully subscribed to and applied martial race theory beginning in the 1880s (Gould 1999). On the military's role in upholding martial race theory see Caplan (1991, 1995) and Streets (2004).
10. Reasons for this supposed loyalty, as well as for volunteering, are multifarious and several theories have been proposed as explanations. There were economic incentives, including a guaranteed job and salary, and the prestige of the profession often passed down generationally (Marston 2014). Also, in order to get a pension, the recruit needed to serve for twenty-five years, which reinforced ties to the army (Khan 2015, 31).

11. By 1945, Indian officers constituted 25 per cent of officers in the Indian Army as compared to 10 per cent in 1939. See Marston (2014, 83).
12. The negative experience in the First World War, when India did not receive any political rewards for its service, was taken as a lesson (Khan 2015).
13. Subhas Chandra Bose organized an Indian National Army (I.N.A.) that aligned with the Axis.
14. The likelihood of demands for independence from colonial authorities was higher in places where the colonized were recruited to fight in the Second World War (Yi 2023).
15. The 10th and 8th divisions rejoined in Florence, which was liberated on August 4. In September 1944, the 8th and 4th reunited on the Adriatic side as the Allies moved farther north. Eventually, in late November 1944, the 4th division was redeployed to Greece. The 8th and 10th instead participated in the offensives for the liberation of Italy until the very end of the war, with the battle for the Po Valley standing out as the last main bulwark in the fight to oust and defeat the Germans in spring 1945 (*'One More River'* 1947; *The Tiger Triumphs* 1946; *Teheran to Trieste* 1946; Hutchinson 1947; Stevens 1948; Prasad 1960; Kavanagh 2014).
16. Relevant information for this research comes from war diaries of the infantry and armored battalions of the 4th and 10th Indian Divisions (The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom and The Gurkha Museum, Winchester) and also from the war diaries of the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade, 25th Indian Infantry Brigade, 10th Indian Divisional Royal Artillery, 10th Indian Division Royal Engineers, Main Head Quarter 8th Army, Monthly summary of Eighth Army operations. We cross-referenced detailed information from nineteen infantry battalions (thirteen of them colonial), three armored battalions, as well as artillery and engineers who fought on the territory. These documents, often handwritten and of a highly technical nature, contain geographic coordinates in code that need to be deciphered in order to reconstruct the war actions on the ground. They are essential to understand the unfolding of the military operations as they were happening and the commanders' plans for the next strategic moves. They rarely feature descriptive narratives.
17. See 'Recommendations for Honors and Awards for Gallant and Distinguished Service,' The National Archives, Kew. We only considered decorations that specifically refer to war events in the valley and were awarded by the end of 1945.
18. In descending order of rank, the following decorations were awarded: one Victoria Cross, two George Cross, three Distinguished Service Order, five Indian Order of Merit, twenty Military Cross, nine Indian Distinguished Service Medal, one Distinguished Service Medal and forty Military Medal.
19. On the R.S.I. propaganda see Fochessati and Franzone eds. (2014). Racist propaganda especially against colonial troops was unleashed during the French occupation of the Rhineland in the First World War (Collar 2013).
20. One of the authors of this article has researched over 100 private diaries written in Italy during the war. Only three diarists make reference to 'nigger' or 'black' soldiers and only one specifically refers to African-Americans. Italians' lack of attention towards troops of color is reversed in the case of the Moroccans fighting for the French. Especially in the area of Latium, negative assessments

about their violent behavior are still part of the locals' collective memory (Baris 2007).

21. For original footage of the passage of the front see the documentary *La guerra in casa. Il passaggio del fronte nell'Alta Valle del Tevere nell'estate del 1944*, by Sandro Busatti and Alvaro Tacchini, produced in 2021 and based on the films and photographs taken by the 10th Division held at the Imperial War Museum in London.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflicts of interest are reported by the authors(s).

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