

Already written in 2002, but gives a good idea, what it is all about.

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„Only Bullets Don't Differentiate between Blacks and Whites“
War Two

Rainer Werning

A group of independent German journalists based in Cologne have ventured into an exciting research project: to work up the unwritten history of the millions of people in the former colonies who served, suffered and died in World War Two. Project research began in 1997 and shall be completed in 2004. During various trips, extensive interviews were already conducted with historians, contemporaries, and war veterans from former colonies in Africa, the Near & Middle East, Asia, Oceania and in Australia. This ambitious study shall be complemented by additional research in archives in Paris, London, Amsterdam and Berlin.

Most standard history books on World War II contain lists of casualties: They read, for example, "55 million victims" and proceed to count: "Soviet Union: 20 million, Germany: 6.5 million, Poland: 5 million, Japan: 2.5 million, Yugoslavia: 1.7 million, France: 635,000, Italy: 500,000, Great Britain: 386,000, United States: 273,000." The only victims who have never been included are those from Africa, Asia and Oceania. Some statistics even fail to mention the "approximately 5 million people" who died in China during World War II. If civilians were to be included, the number of Chinese victims alone may even surpass 10 million.

To this date, the number of victims from the Third World that this war caused has nowhere been investigated systematically, the main reason being that most of the countries concerned were then still under European, American, or Japanese tutelage or control. Their casualties were lumped together with the victims of the colonial powers (and thus reduced significantly), or they were simply never counted. This is all the more appalling since World War II was fought in many Third World countries. European and American historians at best mention black soldiers in World War II as exotic footnotes - be they "Senegalese bowmen" from West Africa or Australian Aborigines. Usually, veterans from the colonies are not invited to attend V-Day celebrations. And until today, they normally do not receive veterans' pensions, or if they do, they just make up a fraction of "white" soldiers' pensions. The French government still pays the equivalent of ten U.S. dollars per month to an ancien combatants from Dakar, Senegal, who had been fighting for four years in the French army in Europe.

Africa and the War

At the outset of the war, the French colonies in Africa were divided into four sectors: North Africa, West Africa, Equatorial Africa, and Madagascar. After the Franco-German armistice in 1940, the collaborators of the pro-German Vichy Regime controlled these colonies. This meant that the native troops, commanded by French officers, were not fighting for the anti-Hitler coalition. Only gradually did they follow General de Gaulle's

call in 1940 "For a Free France".

Towards the end of the war, more than half a million Africans from the French colonies were fighting on de Gaulle's side. At times, they made up fifty to sixty per cent of the soldiers in his ranks. But when it came to marching into Paris, African troops were allegedly replaced by Whites because the French commanders did not want Africans to free their capital. 320,000 soldiers in the French army came from the North African colonies. In return for fighting the Germans, Algerians were promised independence. However, when they demonstrated for that cause, waving Algerian flags, on May 8, 1945, the French army massacred 45,000 people. Worldwide, May 8, 1945, the day of Germany's capitulation, came to be known as the day of liberation from fascism and war. In Algeria, this day was one of the darkest in the nation's history.

During World War II, the French army committed another massacre, murdering soldiers from Senegal. In 1944, at the outskirts of Dakar, "Camp de Thiaroye" housed "Senegalese bowmen" who had come home exhausted from

European battlegrounds. When they were not paid the promised wages, they revolted. The French swiftly moved in military trucks and fired at the crowd, killing many Senegalese soldiers. Ousmane Sembène, the most prominent contemporary Senegalese writer and film director, saved this incidence from sinking into oblivion by turning it into a movie called "Camp de Thiaroye."

The British recruited 372,000 soldiers in their African colonies. Tens of thousands of them from Ghana, Cameroon and other West African countries were shipped to Asia (via South Africa) to fight against the Japanese in the jungles of Burma. After the bombardment of London, the British urged their African colonies to collect goods for homeless and orphaned children in England. Africans, themselves lacking basic goods, donated rice and contributed millet, goats and money. The Masai provided 40,000 heads of cattle for British soldiers on the frontlines.

Asia and the War Besides Europe, Asia was the second most important battleground in World War II. Part of the time of the war, Japan occupied Korea and China, Vietnam and Burma, Thailand and Malaysia (formerly Malaya), Indonesia (formerly Dutch India), Timor, New Guinea and the Philippines as well as some of the Pacific islands. In Asia, too, native soldiers fought in colonial armies on both sides of the front. For example, the Ambonese and the Minahassians made up 80 per cent of the Dutch Indian army. In Burma, native Karen, Chin and Kachin troops fought against the Japanese. The British deployed Indian divisions and the Chinese supported the anti-Japanese battles with hundreds of thousands of soldiers.

In the Philippines, prior to the Japanese invasion, US General Douglas MacArthur had at his command ten divisions comprising 19,000 Americans and 160,000 Filipinos. After the US troops had withdrawn, the Filipino resistance movement Hukbalahap kept fighting alone against the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1944. The Japanese, in turn, forced Koreans to

join their ranks for the Philippine campaign. When the U.S. Air Force "liberated" Manila, they bombed and destroyed the capital regardless of the civilians living there. 100,000 people died, one tenth of the city's population. Hardly any other city in Asia - except for Hiroshima - suffered from the war as much as Manila. (In comparison, 60,000 people died during the bombardment of the German city of Dresden.) Women from the Philippines and other Asian countries are still demanding an apology and a compensation from the Japanese - in vain. These so-called "comfort women" were detained and raped in brothels which the Japanese military authority had installed for their soldiers' "rest & recreation". At least a million so-called "romusha" were drafted by the Japanese Imperial Army as forced laborers in Indonesia to logistically support its troops. Almost one fourth of the victims of the atomic bomb inferno of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, 1945 were Koreans, most of them impoverished peasants, who were made to work in Japanese factories.

In Indochina, native resistance movements kept combating the Japanese army after the French Vichy Regime had left their former colonies. In Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh announced national independence in 1945 for the first time. However, after the War the French returned as a colonial power and triggered the first Vietnam (or Indochina) war. On the Asian battlegrounds, the British as well as the French deployed African soldiers, frequently at the frontlines and in most dangerous and atrocious combats. Colonies of politically "neutral" European powers were drawn into the conflict as well - e.g., the Portuguese colonies Macao and Timor. Australia's Aborigines did not enjoy civil rights until 1967. They were administered by the government's Department for Natural Resources and Wildlife and were banned from voting. However, they served as cannon fodder for the British or Australian army, respectively, from World War I to the Vietnam War. In World War II, Aborigines fought in North Africa, Asia and Europe.

In 1994, Australia showed the first exhibition ever dealing with Aborigines in war times - "from the Somme to Vietnam" - which carried the title "Forgotten Heroes." In 1992, Jack Davis, the most prominent Aboriginal author, wrote a play called "In Our Town." It tells the story of a black soldier who returns from the war, decorated as a 'war hero', but finds that in his white-dominated hometown he is not even allowed to buy a house; the area needs to be kept "clean and white."

The war in the Pacific Many archipelagos in the Pacific were turned into fierce battlegrounds during World War II. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, martial law was in effect in Hawaii for eight years. All around the Solomon Islands, decisive battles between Japanese and US American troops took place. Thousands of islanders served as scouts or coast guards. In Samoa and Vanuatu, gigantic military bases were built.

The islanders in the Pacific region, too, fought on opposite sides. Most joined the U.S. Army, others were forcefully drafted by the Japanese. In New Caledonia and Polynesia, the French recruited soldiers whom they

lumped together into a special "Bataillon du Pacifique." As had been the case during World War I, this battalion was deployed to other continents as well. New Caledonia was an island with merely 50,000 inhabitants. In 1943, after the defeat of Vichy France, 200,000 US soldiers were stationed here.

After the war, when the Pacific islands were liberated from Japanese occupation, the United States took over many of these islands and turned them into military bases or test areas for nuclear weapons, e.g.

Kwajalein, Johnson or the Marshall Islands. Most of these islands were given to the US as trust territories by the United Nations immediately after the war. The UN, however, had issued explicit orders to grant the islands independence as soon as possible. But these areas remained US colonies for decades, due to their strategic location and military importance to the US during the Korean and Indochina wars.

After the World War, the French government also secured control over "her" colonies in Polynesia (including the nuclear test site on Mururoa) and New Caledonia.

South and Central America Most of the countries of South and Central America had gained their (at least formal) independence much earlier than other parts of the world. By 1945, the majority of the Latin American governments had officially declared war

on Germany, partly out of conviction, partly under pressure from the United States. As early as in the Spanish Civil War, a Mexican brigade supported the Republicans against rising fascism. And in World War II as well, soldiers from Mexico and Brazil stood by the Allies.

The French recruited soldiers from their colonies (Guadeloupe, Martinique etc.) for the war in Europe, as they had done earlier during World War I.

In Jamaica, the British hired volunteers for jobs essential to the armament industry. The British naval bases on the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) off Argentina's coast were of crucial importance to maritime warfare in the Atlantic. At the mouth of the Rio de la Plata River close to Montevideo, a naval battle took place in the course of which the German battleship "Graf Spee" was sunk. The "Graf Spee" had endangered the commercial shipping routes off the Latin American coasts. At this time, Uruguay was politically "neutral" which explained why German battle ships were still admitted to anchor in its harbors and to stock up supplies.

COOPERATION IS WELCOME Research into the history of the "Third World during World War II" is still going on and could be aided by D+C readers. While historians in the North have neglected the subject, written and oral information may be available in former colonial countries which needs to be tapped before the participants in and victims of the War may have passed away.

The project team, recherche international e.V., the core-group undertaking the research, which in turn is assisted by the collective of the Cologne-based Rheinisches JournalistInnenbuero, therefore invites

readers to make comments, suggestions, and send informations, bibliographical or otherwise. You may contact us under the following address:

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Though scientific accuracy and historic verification are indispensable, our main focus is on presenting the findings in a way most attractive to as large a public as possible. Lecture tours will be arranged once the book is out in print in 2005.

This project is an undertaking of recherche international e.V. which was founded in 1999 and actively encourages the dialogue between Europe and countries of the so-called Third World in all fields of life. The bulk of the work already completed was done by the free-lance journalists and authors of Rheinisches JournalistInnenbuero which, in turn, spans two decades of in-depth reporting. Their work is broadcast on public radio stations and occasionally on TV.

Dr. Rainer Werning, political scientist and member of Rheinisches JournalistInnenbuero (Cologne, Germany), has been doing extensive research in South East and East Asia since 1970.

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