

D1. Moroccan Soldiers in World War I

As a colony of France, Morocco participated in World War I from 1914 to 1918. Moroccan troops fought alongside the French (on the Allied side) in the French Army of Africa, which also included troops from other French colonies in Africa, such as Algeria and Senegal. The Moroccan troops fought in many major battles on the Western Front. (Interestingly enough, Moroccan soldiers did not seem to be used against their Ottoman co-religionists in the east.) Approximately 45,000 Moroccans fought in the war. 9,000 were killed or missing in action; 17,000 others were wounded or suffered from disease. In addition, there were 38,000 civilian workers (not soldiers, but people who dug trenches and did other kinds of labor) involved in the conflict.

Participation in the conflict brought greater awareness of discrimination suffered at the hands of the French. Some Moroccans also felt that they had sacrificed for the cause and deserved recognition – and independence. Thus, participation in World War I led to the spread of nationalist ideas in North Africa.

Assignment: Imagine you are a Moroccan living in 1916. Write 2 diary entries, each at least one double-spaced page long. Choose names for your characters that are authentic. Also, include at least 5 facts or factual details drawn from the history/ geography of the area. (Be sure to look up additional information in addition to the information found in this reading.) Underline the pieces of information you include in each of your diary entries.

-- You are a young Moroccan soldier in the French Army of Africa fighting in the Battle of Verdun. Write a letter to a friend describing your experiences. (Look up the Battle of Verdun.) Why are you fighting in support of the French? What do you hope to achieve for yourself and your country?

-- You are another young Moroccan who has remained in Morocco. Write a letter to your friend at the front trying to persuade him to return home. Why do you think it is not his responsibility to fight for France? What do you feel about the French protectorate and its impact on Morocco? (Look up 'French Protectorate of Morocco.')