

Indian Armed Forces Memorial – France

A project to build an Indian Armed Forces Memorial in France is being undertaken by the USI CAFHR as a part of the India and the Great War centenary commemoration project. It consists of the Indian National Emblem of the Ashoka Lions in bronze and is the second such overseas national memorial in the world, highlighting the sacrifice of Indian servicemen in the cause of world peace.

The suggestion of a suitable memorial was mooted by senior USI members and land for the memorial has since been gifted by the people of France in the village of Villers-Guislain on the site of the battlefield of Cambrai where Indian cavalry regiments were heavily involved in Nov/Dec 1917. Lance Dafadar Gobind Singh, 28th Light Cavalry, attached to 2nd Lancers, won the Victoria Cross for his death defying feats of gallantry close to the site on 01 Dec 1917.

On 02 Dec 2017, at an impressive ceremony attended by representatives of the USI and the Indian Embassy in France, the plans for the Memorial were formally unveiled. The ceremony was organised by Mr Gérard Allart, Mayor of Villers-Guislain and was supported by the Embassy of India in France. It was attended by over 300 people including young school children, veterans and local residents along with representatives of the USI and the Indian Embassy. In a moving ceremony, the French school children commemorated the role of the Indian soldiers on the Western Front during World War I by singing and playing the Indian National Anthem. The enthusiasm and dedication of all involved was most commendable.

During the ceremony, the Mayor recalled the supreme sacrifice, valour and dedication of the Indian soldiers who had fought for the freedom of France a century ago. He lamented the fact that despite heavy casualties there was not a single Indian grave or memorial in the area, as none of the bodies of those brave soldiers could be recovered from the battlefields. He stated

that it was incumbent upon the present and future generations to never forget this sacrifice.

In addressing the gathering Sqn Ldr RTS Chhina, MBE (Retd), Secretary USI CAFHR expressed his gratitude to the people of France for their magnificent gesture and expressed the hope that the memorial would serve not only to honour the memory of those brave Indian soldiers, sailors and airmen who fell in the line of duty but would also be a permanent reminder of the strong ties that exist between the two nations.

The Memorial is planned to be inaugurated on 29 Sep 2018, on the day the village was liberated from the Germans a 100 years ago.



Photograph of the ceremony held in France on 02 Dec 2017



**French children commemorating the role of
Indian soldiers at the ceremony**