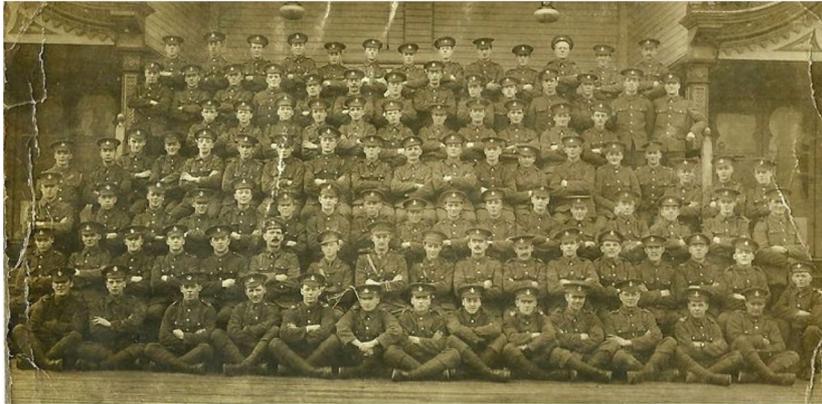


Peter Hulme

## Lancashire's Unknown Black Soldiers



Initially, the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment mostly recruited in Preston, Chorley, Bolton, and Wigan. This picture shows what it looked like around the beginning of the First World War: needless to say, impeccably white.



There'd been a long debate within the British Army about the role that colonial troops should play. 'Not in combat roles, and certainly not in Europe' had been the mantra. The Army was initially opposed to having *black* soldiers at all, but by early 1918 it was desperately short of men. West Indies Regiments were recruited and involved in combat, though not in Europe. Finally the Army decided to recruit among the large number of British citizens – most of them (despite this poster) black West Indians – who were living on the east coast of the USA.

The British Army set up recruiting offices in several cities, including one in New York on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, right next to the New York Public Library, and they opened the recruiting campaign by sending across the Atlantic one of the new-fangled tanks, yet to be used in combat, which rolled up and down Fifth Avenue.

By this stage of the war, the Army was not too particular about who it signed up.



One of the first recruits in New York was a young Nicaraguan poet called Salomón de la Selva. He was assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion of the Loyal North Lancs, a reserve unit based at Felixstowe as part of the Harwich Defences.

Although he probably didn't know it, Salomón de la Selva himself had Lancastiran ancestry. After Central America became independent in the early nineteenth century, British businesses established themselves in

