Britain, the “old lion,” the greatest imperial power at the turn of the twentieth century, was greatly assisted by its dominions and colonies in its battle against the Central Powers in the First World War. At the outset of war, in August 1914, Britain’s self-governing dominions of Canada, Newfoundland, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa joined the war effort against Germany. South African forces enjoyed remarkable victories in East and Southwest Africa and also served in France. The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, known as ANZAC, in a mere four months successfully seized all German territory in the Pacific and also participated in the Battle of Gallipoli near the Dardanelles. All told, Australia and New Zealand suffered some of the highest casualty rates, 65 percent for Australia and 58 percent for New Zealand.

Many dominions and colonies provided military and financial aid to Britain. The Indian government donated its entire year’s revenue of £100 million to the British war effort; the Galla tribe from British East Africa made a gift of £200. Some two and a half million colonials fought for the Crown in World War I. In November 1918, 82,000 Egyptians, 8,000 West Indians, 1,200 Cape Coloured, 1,000 Mauritians, and 100 Fijians were serving the British Empire outside of their home countries.

India provided vast numbers of troops on virtually every battlefield, including the Western Front, where in autumn 1914 as many as one-third of all British forces in France were from India, either as Indian army troops or as British personnel.

During World War I, the Parliamentary Recruitment Committee generated posters, booklets, and folders to persuade British men to enlist. Wardle’s poster was part of this effort, but the Parliamentary Recruitment Committee rejected Frank Brangwyn’s design for its bleak portrayal of death and destruction. The commercial manager of the Underground Electric Railways Company of London Limited picked up Brangwyn’s sketch and in 1915 made it into a poster that was most likely displayed throughout the London Underground. Wardle’s and Brangwyn’s posters illustrate two tactics of motivating men to enlist: to challenge the individual to act in accordance with other countries faithfully upholding their duty to the Empire and to inspire the fear that the Empire is in jeopardy and that individuals must leap to its immediate defense.

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