

'No Parades'

V1 We were raised up as sons of the empire
To King George we were loyal and true
And when war was declared, without question
Volunteer was the least we could do¹
So at Up Park Camp, Kingston, Jamaica
We were schooled in the tools of our trade
And we sang all our songs of old England
And we dreamed of our welcome parades

V2 How we wanted to prove as a soldier
That "the black man's as good as the white"²
If an infantryman has no rifle
Well then, how in the hell can he fight?
They assigned us in "Labour Battalions"
With a mop and a bucket and spade
Far away from the trenches and fighting
Far away from the marching parades

**No parades for us, boys
The West Indian will have no parades
From Jamaica, Barbados, Guiana³
From the islands and mainland we came
To fight and to show our allegiance
But returned to our homelands in shame
While for some there'll be honour and glory
The West Indian will have no parades**

V3 In the scrublands of Mesopotamia
And the deserts of Egypt we worked⁴
When they gave us a chance for some fighting
We defeated the Hun and the Turk
But when armistice came in November
We were told our return was delayed
And they shipped us away to Taranto
Where we missed all the victory parades

¹ The BWIR were formed in 1915 as a response to the demand in the Caribbean from those who wanted to enlist but were not permitted to join other regiments.

² Adapted from the 1919 Colonial Office memo: "Nothing we can do will alter the fact that the black man has begun to think and feel himself as good as the white."

³ The 3rd line of every chorus can rotate locations so would be sung by the soloist.

⁴ The BWIR were also stationed in Jordan and Palestine, famously involved in the victory at Adam's Bridge.

**No parades for us, boys
The West Indian will have no parades
The Bahamas, Honduras, Grenada
From the islands and mainland we came
To fight and to show our allegiance
But returned to our homelands in shame
While for some there'll be honour and glory
The West Indian will have no parades**

V4 We awaited demobilisation
All that winter of 1918
While we toiled in the grime of Taranto
Loading ammo and cleaning latrines
When they treated the whites to a pay rise
It was like someone lobbed a grenade
All our years of resentment exploded
Saying, to hell with their rules and parades

**No parades for us, boys
The West Indian will have no parades
From the Leewards, St Lucia, St Vincent
From the islands and mainland we came
To fight and to show our allegiance
But returned to our homelands in shame
While for some there'll be honour and glory
The West Indian will have no parades**

V5 In disgrace and disarmed and disbanded
For our mutinous ways we were spurned
But through hardship and humiliation
A politicised soldier returned⁵
Some were punished or forced into exile
Oh, but many a veteran stayed
And we led them towards independence
We old soldiers who had no parades

**No parades for us, boys
The West Indian will have no parades
Out of Trinidad and from Tobago
From the islands and mainland we came
To fight and to show our allegiance
But returned to our homelands in shame
While for some there'll be honour and glory
The West Indian will have no parades**

© Chris Hoban 2017

⁵ This included Gunner Norman Manley, who served in the Royal Field Artillery and went on to become Jamaica's first prime minister in 1962.