

India's 1857 war is 150 years old

by UPI

NEW DELHI - India prepared to observe the 150th anniversary of its 1857 War, referred to as the First War of Independence against the British and the Sepoy Mutiny.

It was on May 11, 150 years ago that the mutinous Indian soldiers from the nearby Meerut attacked British officers to free their land from the British East India Co.'s rule.

Although freedom for the country would not come until 90 years later in 1947, the 1857 soldiers pressed on.

The British crushed the revolt because the Indian soldiers, made up of Hindus and Muslims, refused to fire bullets they had been told were greased with forbidden beef and pork fat.

The 1857 war brought direct and tougher rule of India by the British government. The victory also ended the Mughal rule with the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar being exiled to Burma.

One argument against calling the 1857 rebellion the first war of independence is that India was not one country at the time but a group of princely states. Other historians say the British deliberately played it down.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said the country "cannot forget those inspired revolutionaries -- many of them anonymous to history -- who sacrificed their lives in 1857 to free the country from foreign yoke," the BBC reported.

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