

World War I
Day by Day
1915 – 1918

February 1916 / février 1916

La première guerre mondiale
De jour en jour
1915 – 1918



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1 February 1916

Commémoration



The Friends of the Canadian War Museum is a corporation dedicated to the financial support and volunteer assistance to the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

The program «The First World War Day-by-Day» added to the Museum's work in commemorating the Centennial of the First World War in 2016.

This educational project was managed exclusively by volunteers.



Les Amis du Musée canadien de la Guerre est une corporation vouée au support financier et à l'assistance bénévole du Musée canadien de la Guerre d'Ottawa.

Le programme «La Première Guerre mondiale de jour en jour» appuie le Musée dans sa commémoration du Centenaire de la Première guerre mondiale.

Ce projet est géré exclusivement par des bénévoles.



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2 February 1916

The Middle East Imbrolio



Colonel Sir Tatton Benvenuto Mark Sykes, 6th Baronet
(16 March 1879 – 16 February 1919)



François Marie Denis Georges-Picot
(21 December 1870 – 20 June 1951)

Foreign Office Permanent Secretary Nicolson submits the Sykes-Picot draft agreement to Foreign Secretary Grey on **2 February, 1916** with the wrong proviso that the recommendations emanating are from McMahon in Cairo.

They are from Mark Sykes in London and contain the Arab position proposed earlier with the understanding that the Alexandretta landing would take place. This is now completely by-passed by events, the landing having been rejected earlier. Grey is being misled.

Meanwhile the McMahon assessment is not shown to Grey. The draft agreement will be approved on the 5th of February. From there it will be sent to Moscow for approval in principle before formal ratification between France and Great Britain.

Nicolson is keeping McMahon at bay during the Russian consultations. None in Cairo Intelligence have any idea of the objectionable content of the Sykes-Picot draft agreement.

Sykes goes to Russia with François-Georges Picot. Meanwhile the lead of the Cairo Arab Office being created slips from his grasp. General Clayton is appointed and the Bureau remains an Intelligence office, not a political one as Sykes would have wished to make it with him as its head.

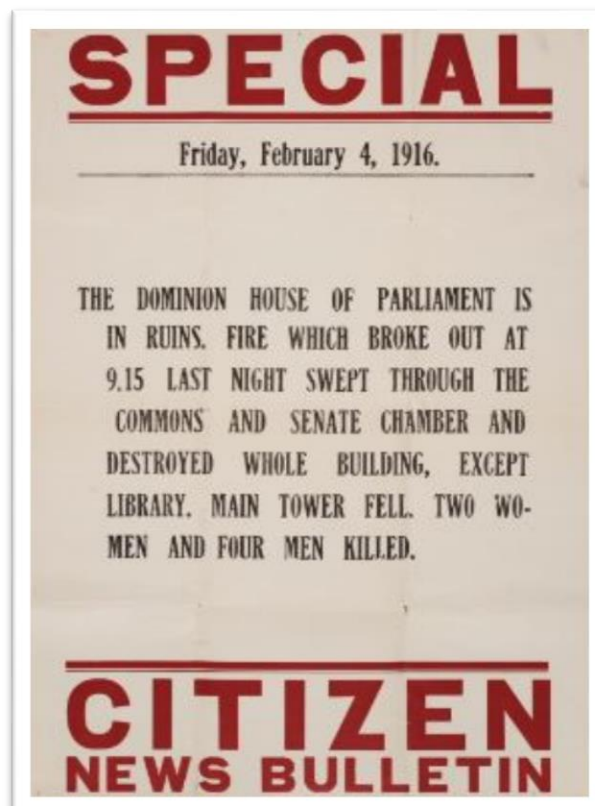
La main gauche ne sait pas ce que fait la main droite.

Wilson, Lawrence, 245.



3 February 1916

Canadian Parliament Burns



The Central Block of the Parliament Building on the Hill in Ottawa burned down during the night of **3-4 February 1916**.

The Session was continued in the Victoria Memorial Museum Building now housing the modern Museum of Nature, in Ottawa.

The new Parliament, having been rebuilt in wartime, was strongly influenced by war art, in architecture, sculpture and paintings.

The commemoration of the First World War is today the major theme in the Central Block on the Parliament Hill.



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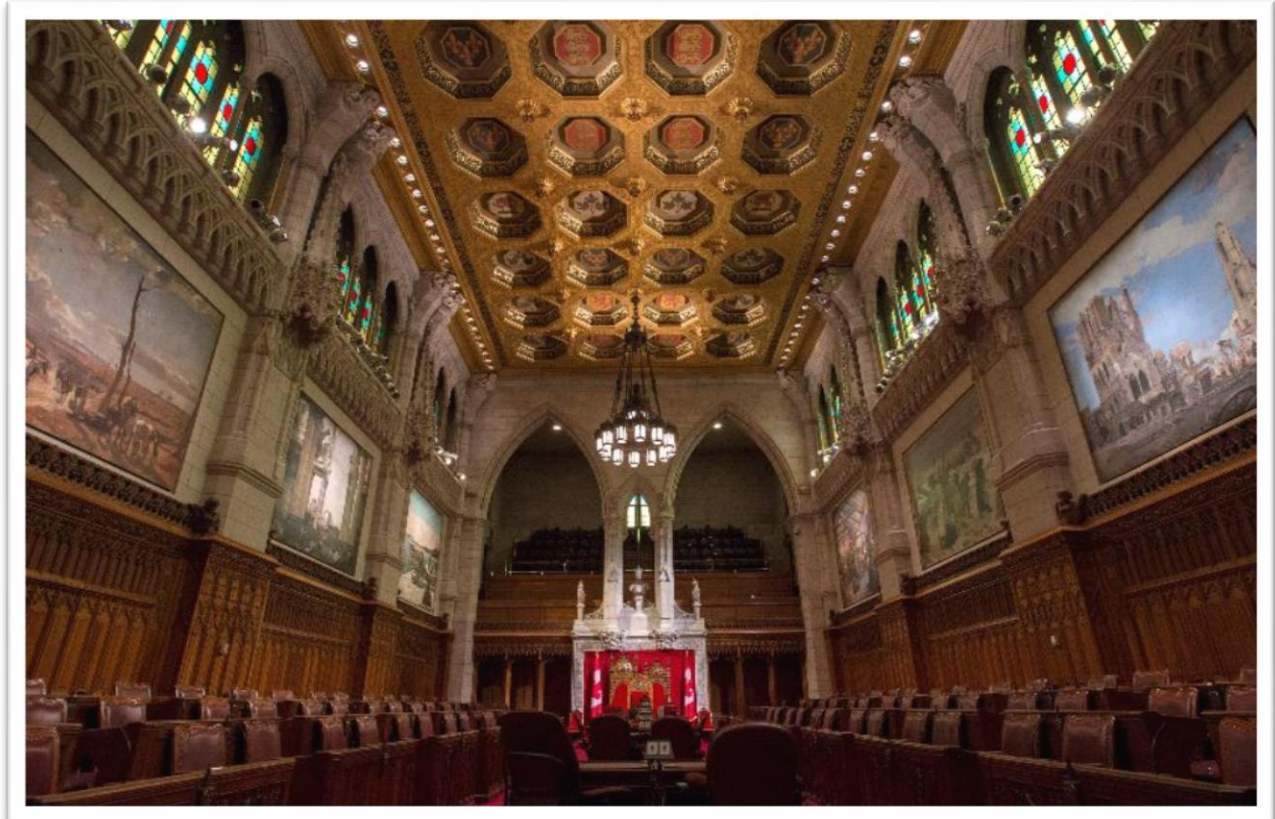
4 February 1916

Le Parlement du Canada et l'Art de Guerre



Le Parlement du Canada est fortement influencé par l'art de guerre, dans son architecture, dans sa sculpture et dans les peintures décoratives.

Ceci est dû au fait que le Bloc central a brûlé et a été reconstruit pendant la Première Guerre mondiale.



Parlement aujourd'hui



5 February 1916

Nurse Dorothy Cotton in Petrograd



Dorothy Cotton is a Canadian nurse from Kingston, Ontario, working in Saint Petersburg, Russia.

She has volunteered in England to join the Anglo-Russian Hospital.

She travelled to Murmansk in November 1915, and is now at the Hospital on **5 February 1916**, the day of the arrival of patients.

The hospital is established in the Dmitri Palace, where a staff of British Army Medical Corps have come to help the Russians cope with the war.

Dorothy Cotton has left a manuscript journal of her experiences as a nurse in the war. The document is held at the Library and Archives Canada and is one of the best personal documents left by a nurse involved in the First War.

Mélanie Morin-Pelletier, *Briser les ailes de l'ange*, p. 107ff
<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/canada-nursing-sisters/pages/dorothy-cotton.a.spx>



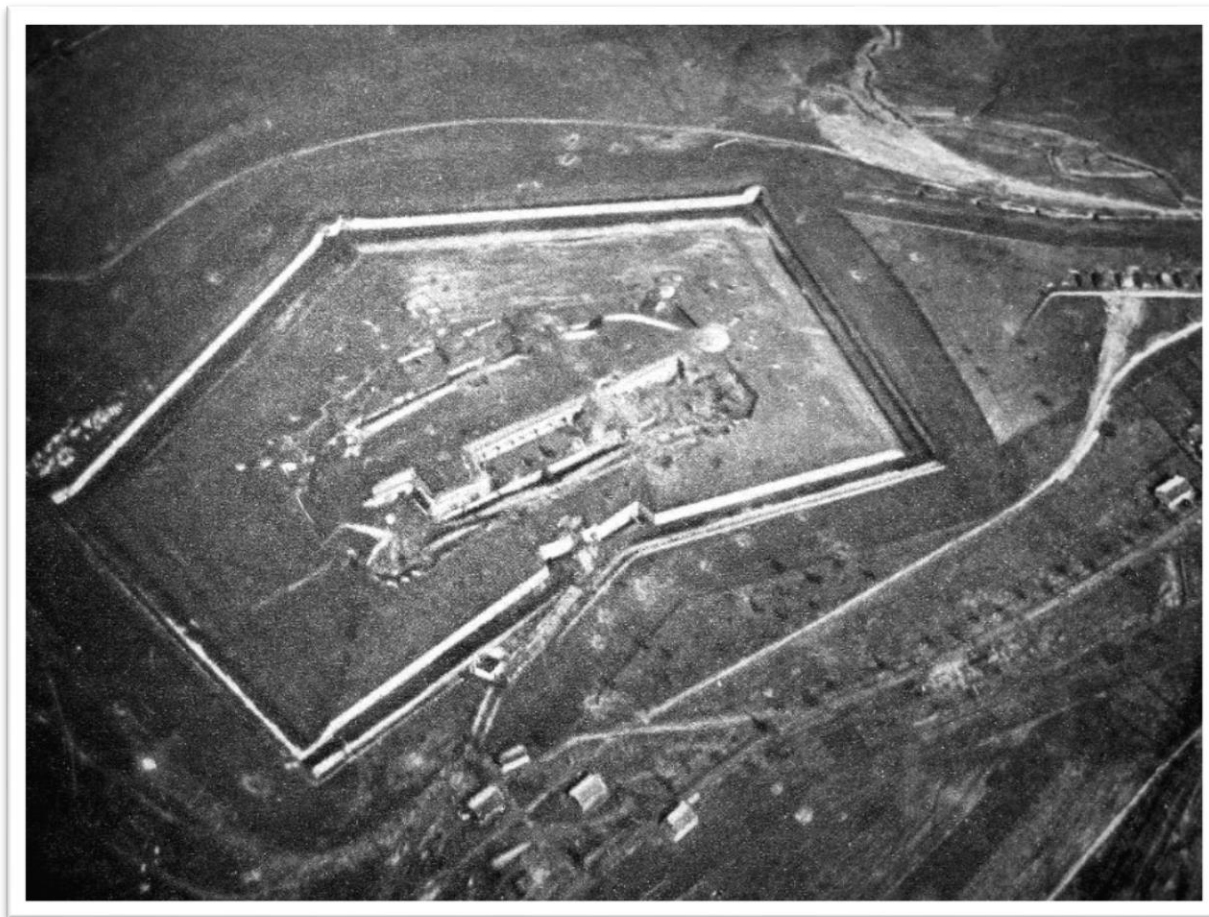
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6 February 1916

Something's afoot in Verdun



Recent complaints by Gen Herr, French Commander of the fortified region of Verdun, and depositions by Colonel Driant, a member of parliament from Nancy, have alerted the French Government to German preparations in progress in front of the 'fortified region' of Verdun, to which the present defences are believed inadequate.

A Parliamentary Commission concerned with these reports asked Gen Gallieni, the Minister of War, and General Joffre, the Commander-in-Chief of French armies, to look into the matter.

Joffre pointed out that similar preparations were being reported by Gen Gouraud (Fourth Army) in Champagne, and that adequate reinforcements were being developed.

These improvements were the enlargement to 8 meters of the Verdun-Bar-le-Duc road, allowing two rows of vehicles, in the expectation that the railway Verdun-St. Menéhould would be lost early in a fight, and the improvement of the Mensien meter-gauge line so as to be able to deal with a tonnage of 1,800 tons, rather than 400 tons per day.



7 February 1916

Air Operations: 'Chasseurs'



In February 1916, the French are beginning to regroup their fighter aircraft in separate squadrons.

While fighters up to now would accompany reconnaissance aircraft as close defensive protection in their vital missions of battlefield photography, the '*chasseurs*' are now taking on a new independent offensive role.

Groups of fighters go out 'hunting' on their own to find the enemy outside of the immediate battlefield area and work out group combat tactics so as to eliminate any type of enemy aircraft that might be encountered. This will extend to attacks on enemy aerodromes, where parked aircraft will be strafed or bombed on the ground.

This new energy, nurtured by technical advances that boost morale for the Entente pilots, brings the concept of domination of the sky. Air Supremacy becomes an objective in itself.

Its effect on operations is significant: it allows one side to know more about the other side.

From 1916 onward, air dominance will change from one side to the other many times.

Liddell Hart, [The First World War](#), Chap 7: Panorama: The War in the Air, p. 356.



8 February 1916

Le Comité de l'Aviation britannique



RFC badge



RNAS badge

En réponse aux inquiétudes au sujet des bombardements des Zeppelins sur Londres, le Cabinet britannique décide, **en février 1916**, de remédier à la séparation entre les deux services aériens en créant un comité commun présidé par Lord Derby, le sous-secrétaire au ministère de la Guerre qui vient justement de terminer le programme de recrutement volontaire qui a porté son nom.

Le but de cette initiative est de rationaliser la gestion des ressources entre le **Royal Flying Corps (RFC)** de l'Armée et le **Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS)** de la Marine.

Mais le comité ne pourra pas arriver à ses objectifs, la Marine royale refusant d'y porter son concours.

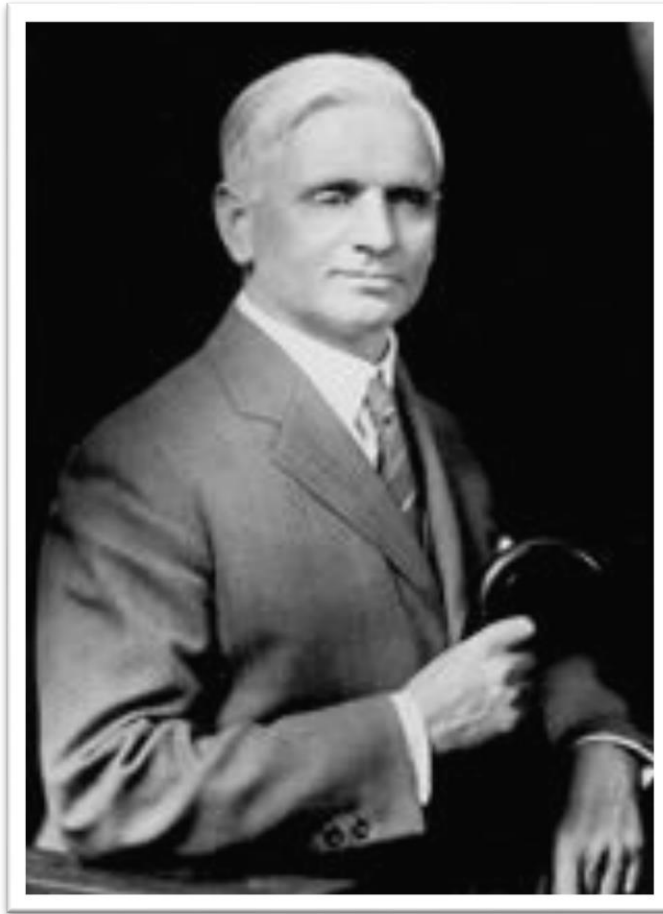
Derby devra démissionner devant son incapacité à amener les deux services à cesser leur compétition outrageuse.

Lloyd George, Memoirs, IV, p. 1848-9.



9 February 1916

United States: The Gore-McLemore Resolution on trans-Atlantic travel



Senator Thomas P. Gore

The German Navy has had brushes with non-military ships that have opened fire on their submarines after being arraigned at sea. The German Admiralty has now made it clear that it will consider any ship of any description known to be armed as hostile and liable to be sunk on sight.

The United States Congress and Senate are troubled by these threats and want to spare American citizens the danger of naval interdiction on the high seas.

But **Senator Thomas P. Gore** and Congressman Jeff McLemore do not succeed in passing a resolution preventing Americans from traveling on armed vessels, thereby reducing the chances for a diplomatic clash with Germany that may bring war.

President Wilson opposes the resolution on liberal grounds, arguing that the war in Europe should not infringe on the freedom of American citizens to travel in the manner that they choose, or where they choose to travel.

The Wilson government is intent to tell the world that the United States are not at war, and insists in wanting to maintain the recognition of its neutrality in the conflict.

Thomas G. Paterson, *American Foreign Policy*, Second Ed. 1984, p.32-3.



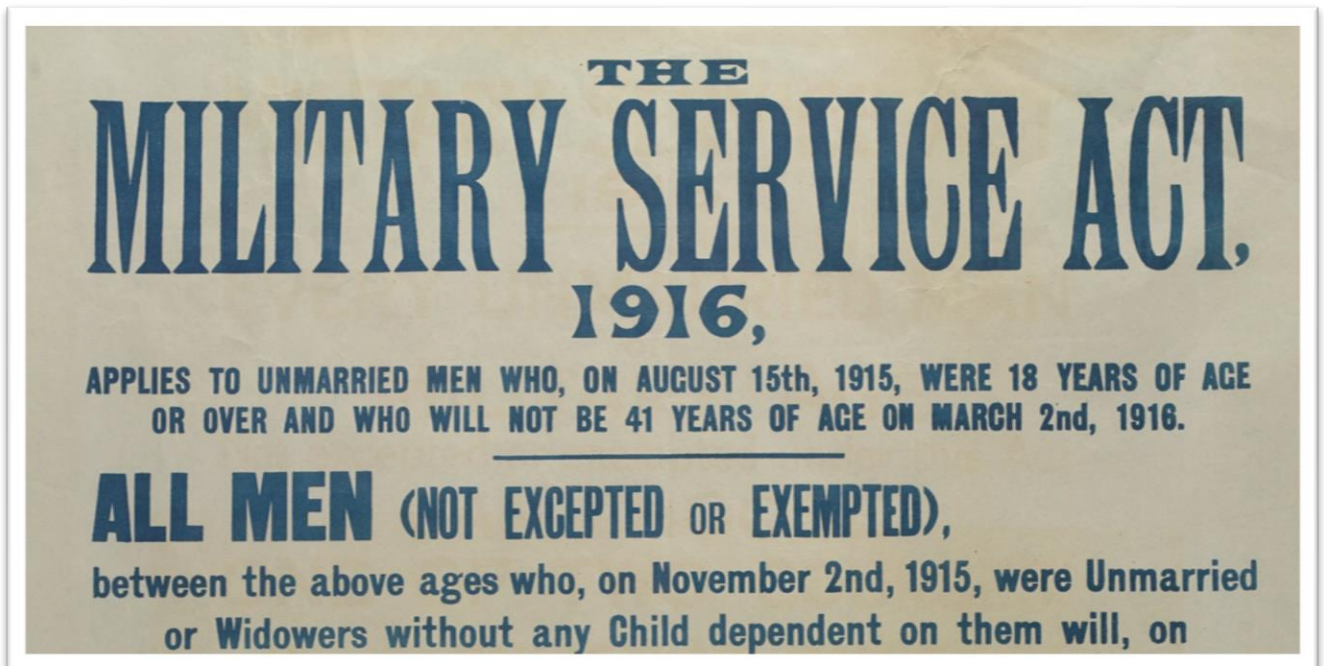
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10 February 1916

The Military Service Law in Great Britain—What's in it for Canada?



On 10 February 1916, the Canadian public hears that Great Britain has now a fully working compulsory service law for unmarried men between the ages of 18 and 41.

Many in Canada think that similar laws should be enacted so that the number of men serving overseas be increased in proportion to the Imperial effort.

This is unacceptable to many who do not agree that compulsory service should be imposed on the Dominion.

The British initiative is of great importance to politicians. They now know that the laws for forced military service are fully constitutional in the British parliamentary system and are an option for the Government of Canada.

It is one more step toward the aggravating dichotomy of public opinion on the issue.



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11 February 1916

New Equipment reaches the CEF

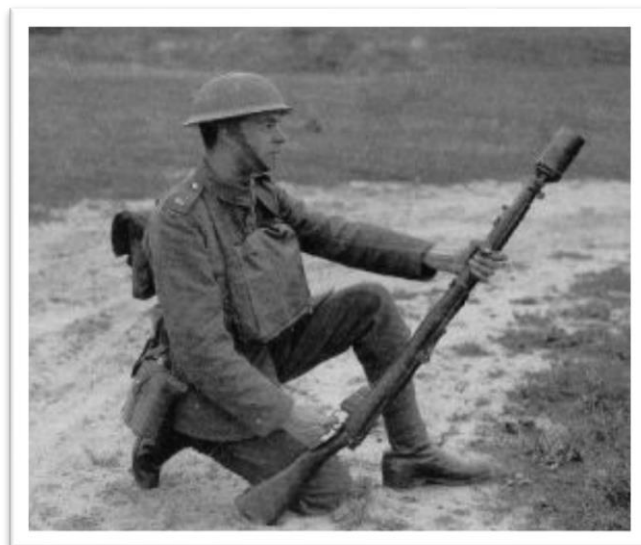
With reorganization of the British Ministry of Munitions in 1915, new equipment has been produced for the battlefield soldier.

The equipment is issued in large numbers in the Canadian Corps starting in early 1916.



The Mills grenade is a much better weapon than what was used before. It will inspire the shape of grenades of a century.

The Mills can be used with a new grenade launcher fitted to the rifle that gives it a much longer range.



The **Lewis automatic rifle** replaced the obsolete Colt machine gun on tripod. The Lewis is lighter, magazine-fed, with a low profile. It is a great improvement for the already heavily loaded soldier.

These are all improvements that boost troop morale.



12 February 1916

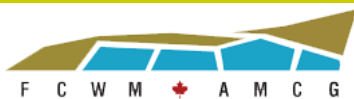
Réduction du transport maritime



Lord Curzon, du Comité du Cabinet britannique sur le transport maritime rapporte que la situation est telle qu'il faut réduire les plans de 25 %.

La guerre sousmarine fait ses ravages et les plus longs parcours pour éviter les pièges retardent les livraisons.

Lloyd George, Memoirs, III:p. 1214.



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13 February 1916

German attack at Seppois



The German High Command has organized a series of attacks in which it is studying the results of artillery preparation so as to achieve surprise with massive artillery.

This is in consideration of the Allies' failures in 1915, with long artillery preparations that revealed the time and point of attacks.

These studies are in view of orchestrating a massive surprise in Verdun in the upcoming campaign. Such trial attacks have already been run by Falkenhayn on Jan 8th, 23rd, 24th and 28th.

General C.M.E. Mangin, «Verdun, The Battles of», EB (12th Ed., 1922), XXXII, pp. 918.



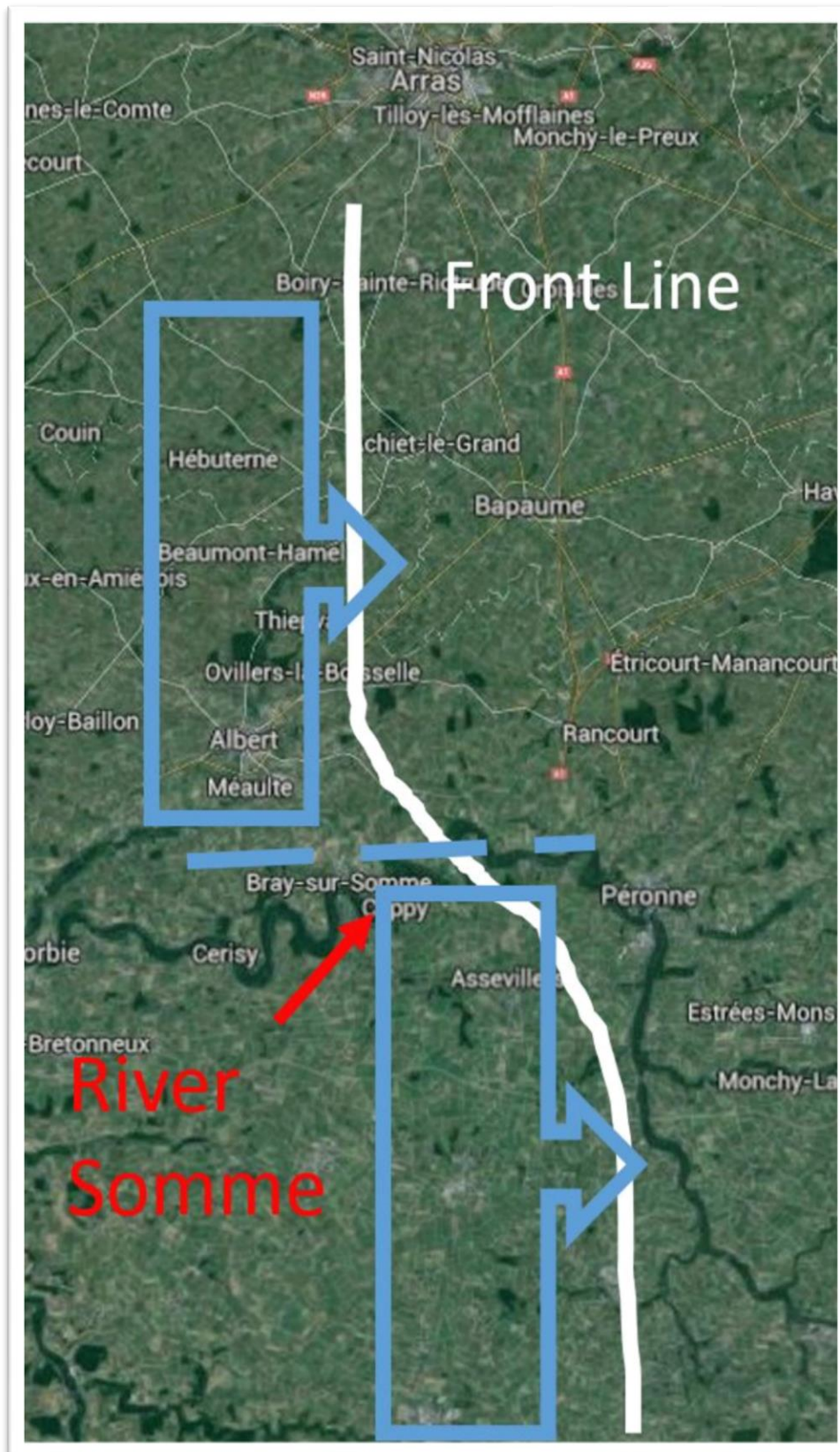
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14 February 1916

The Somme of it all



The French and British governments have agreed on 28 December 1915 that the summer offensive would be a fully coordinated affair, with the Russians, the Italians, and the French and British launching together so as to confuse the Germans on many simultaneous fronts.

The French and British now agree to a plan proposed by Joffre, that the main offensive in France will take place in the region of the Somme river, on a front of 70 kilometers, with the French taking the larger portion in the south.

The French are to provide 42 divisions for a front of 43 kilometers, south of the river, and the British, north of the River, will provide 25 divisions to cover 27 kilometers.

These plans are agreed at a conference at the *Grand Quartier Général* on **14 February 1916**.

Both armies are shifting forces for the operation and bringing immense resources forward so as to be ready for 1 July (a date agreed with the Russians).



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15 February 1916

Le Colonel House à Londres



Edward Mandell House représente le Président Wilson

Le confident du Président Wilson et influent supporteur du Parti démocrate américain, le 'Colonel' House, rencontre, le soir du **14 février 1916**, les principaux ministres britanniques.

La rencontre de Reading House offre au gouvernement britannique que le président Wilson entreprenne une mission de médiation entre les belligérants pour tenter de trouver une formule de Paix.

Le Gouvernement britannique n'est pas disposé à accepter une telle médiation sans que les États-Unis n'offrent la certitude que si les Pouvoirs de l'Alliance centrale refusent de négocier, les États-Unis entrent en guerre du côté de l'Entente.

Le Colonel House doit d'ailleurs rencontrer le Gouvernement allemand dans les jours qui viennent.

Il en résultera que le Président Wilson, qui se prépare pour les élections de novembre, ne voudra pas être perçu comme laissant la porte ouverte à une intervention possible de l'Amérique.

L'offre de House restera lettre morte.

Lloyd George, Memoirs, II: 686-93.



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16 February 1916

The Indian Army comes under British Supreme Command



The Indian Army under the Command of the British Military Council

Up to this point in the War, the Indian Army had its own command in India, under the British Viceroy of India and a British-officered India High Command

But with recent events in Mesopotamia, where the operational planning has shown itself to be lacking, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Robertson, has recommended that the Indian Army fall under the Military Council, in London, and that its operations be coordinated as any other armies of the Empire.

This means that from **16 February, 1916**, the Mesopotamia operation, where a division of the Indian Army is under siege in Kut, will be relieved by Imperial forces, including appropriate elements of any force under the British command available for the task.

Hankey, Supreme Command, II: p. 500.



17 February 1916

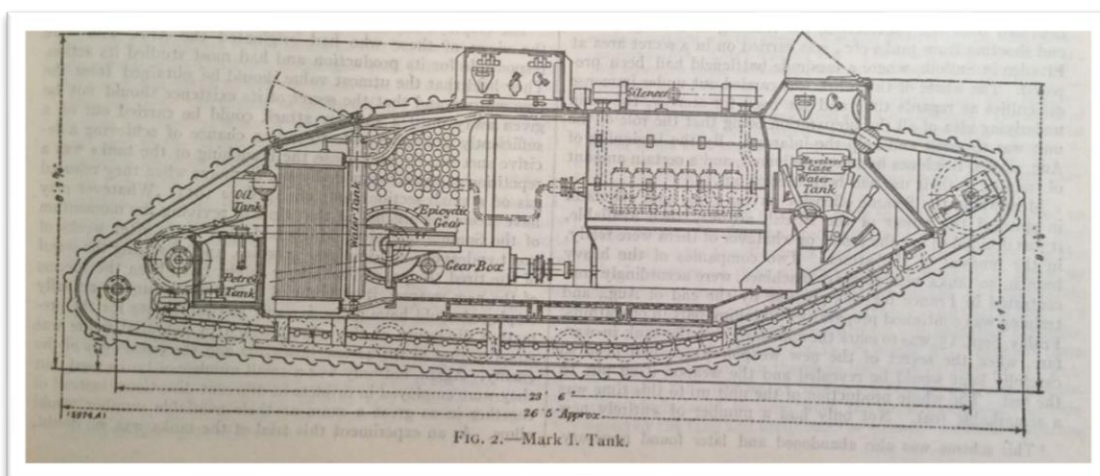
Tanks – Now a question of supply



The ranking Admiralty member, E.H.T. D'Eyncourt, of the Ministry of Munitions' new Tank Supply Committee, writes to Churchill at the front to tell him about the extraordinary developments surrounding the acceptance of the landship designs.

The first prototype was ready in January, a formal demonstration to senior officials took place on 2 February, Haig has now ordered 100 tanks for the BEF in their present form (Mark 1), and the Ministry of Munitions has taken over the whole project. The Landship Committee has been disbanded and personnel transferred to the « **Tank Supply Committee** » of the Ministry of Munitions, which will look after the industrial production.

For the introduction of tanks into the British Army, a Heavy Section has been created in the Machine Gun Corps and training will take place in Bisley and Thetford. **On 17 February 1916**, it is hoped that after 50 have been produced that more copies will be ordered.



Fuller, Tanks, 20-30.



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18 February 1916

Air Defence of British Isles



The air defence of the British Isles is taken over by the British Home Forces' Royal Flying Corps (RFC) from the Royal Navy Air Service (RNAS) on 16 February 1916. Mission: Bring down the raiding Zeppelins.

Sweetman, John, Cavalry of the Clouds: Air War over Europe, 1914-1918 (Spellmount, 2010), p. 75.



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19 février 1916

Joffre à Verdun



Alerté que des préparations sérieuses y sont de toute évidence en cours chez l'ennemi, où l'on constate des concentrations de troupes, Joffre se rend lui-même le **19 février 1916** à Verdun pour discuter des défenses avec les officiers qui en ont la charge.

Le général Castelnau, son chef de l'état-major au Ministère, est allé sur place depuis le 24 janvier à produire des rapports sur l'état des préparations et analyser le renseignement disponible. Joffre refuse toutefois de croire qu'il s'agit d'une opération offensive majeure.

Bien qu'il ne soit plus commandant-en-chef du front de France – il a été nommé Commandant-en-chef de tous les fronts français justement pour l'éloigner du champ de bataille, Joffre ne peut se retenir d'agir comme s'il l'était. Il s'adresse aux commandants de groupes d'armées et d'armées directement, leur enjoignant de prendre les précautions qu'il a lui-même négligées plus tôt.

Farrar-Hockley, The Somme, p. 45.

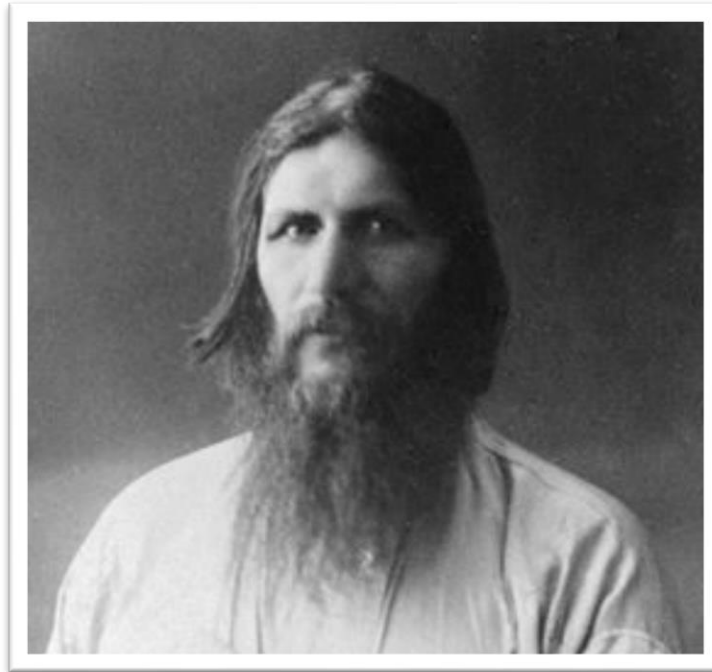


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20 February 1916

Rasputin behind the Throne



Tsar Nicholas has chosen to proclaim himself the Supreme Commander of the Russian Army, and to move to the stavka, the military headquarters near Mogilev, in September 1915.

There he eclipsed the Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolayevich and replaced the Chief of staff, General Yanushkevich, with General Alexeyev.

Meanwhile Tsarina Alexandra took power in her own hands in Petrograd, fighting the Duma (Parliament) and every minister not subjugated to her rule. Behind the Empress stood **Grigori Rasputin**, a half-demented preacher who had succeeded in gaining influence over her by promising that he would bring God to save the dynasty for her husband, and their heir from disease.

On 20 February 1916, Nicholas personally goes to the Duma to prevent the rising of a Progressive bloc, intent on reducing the influence of the House of Romanov. He threatens once again to dismiss the Assembly if it causes obstruction to the conduct of the War. His subsequent dismissal of the Minister of War, Polivanov, a well-respected man not endorsed by Rasputin, is an act of blindness.

This marks the point of no return in the disruption of Russian polity.

Richard Charques, *The Twilight of Imperial Russia*, (Oxford University Press paperbacks, 1958, rpt 1967), p. 224-8.



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21 February 1916

The sound of Verdun in London



At its meeting of **22 February 1916**, the British War Committee reflects a new uncertainty about the summer of 1916.

Arthur Balfour, the First Lord of the Admiralty, is not convinced that an all-out offensive in France as presented by General Haig is the right move.

David Lloyd-George now states that the output of shells for a summer campaign might not suffice, despite his thorough reorganization at Munitions. The Committee is in fact not sure it has enough facts to adjust the decisions already taken.

And there are no voices arguing for alternate campaigns, after the searing failure at Gallipoli and the ruinous stalemate in Mesopotamia.

Obviously, Germany has already forced the issue on the previous day.

News of the severity of the assault in Verdun already suggests that the current plans for the Somme offensive have been outwitted.

The shock effect of the awful surprise in France has reverberated all the way out to London.

R. J. Adams, [Balfour: The Last Grandee](#)



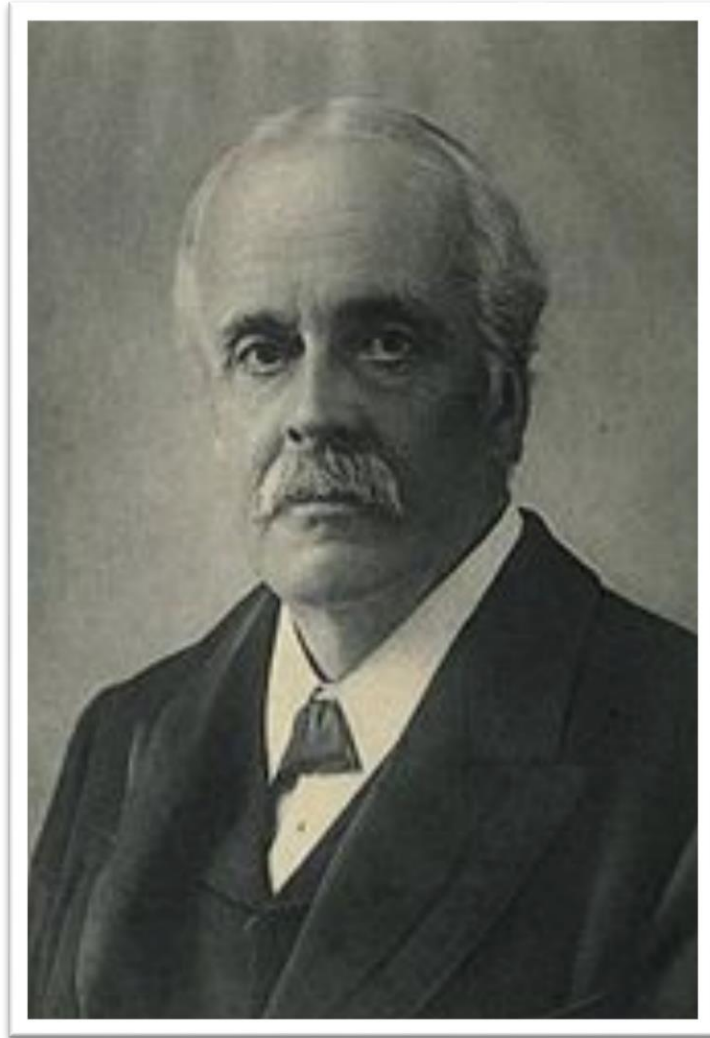
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22 February 1916

Uncertainty in the War Committee



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R.J. Adams, Balfour: The Last Grandee



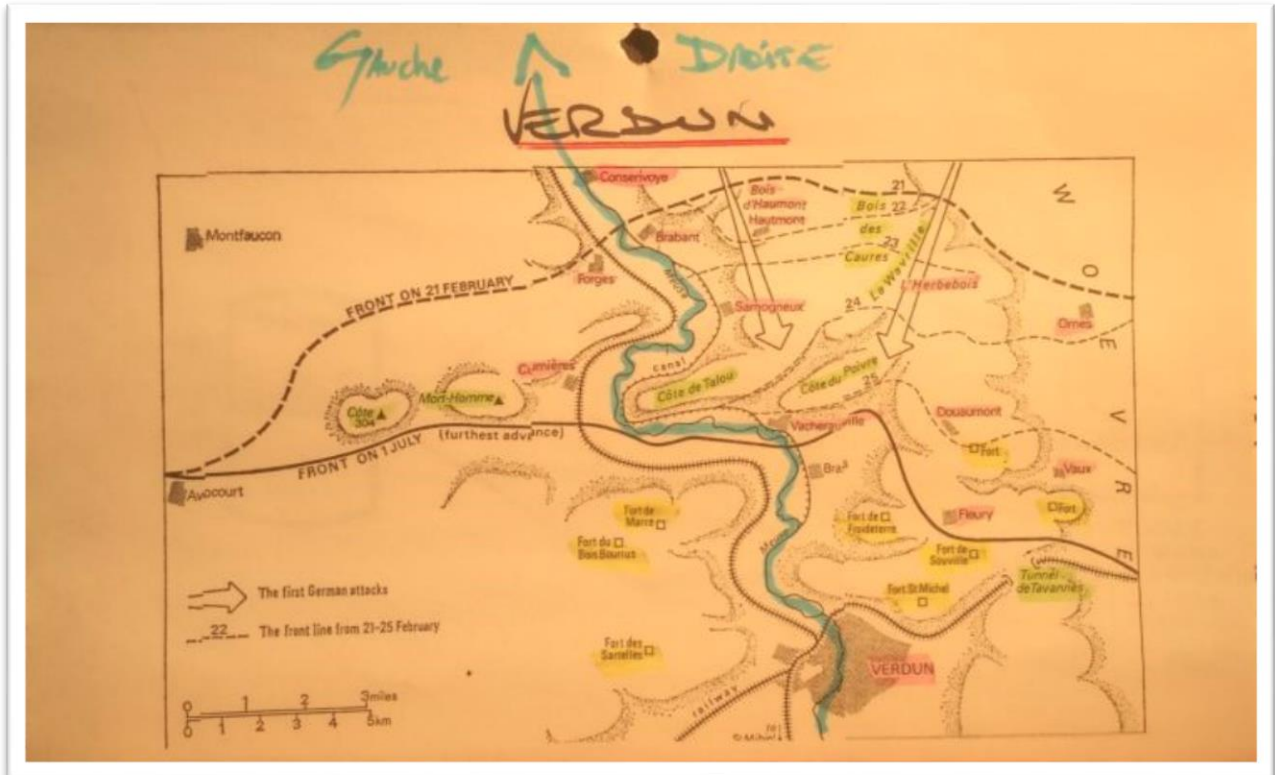
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23 February 1916

Verdun: Trois divisions françaises déchiquetées au Bois d'Haumont



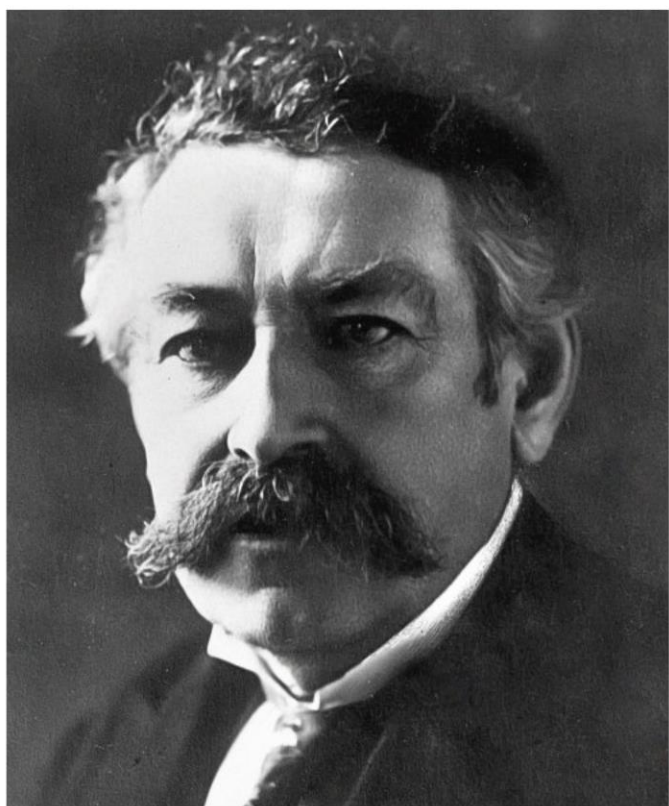
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24 February 1916

Briand asserts French political control



Aristide Pierre Henri Briand (28 March 1862 – 7 March 1932)
French Prime Minister for 11 terms

Historian A.J.P. Taylor, the *enfant terrible* of academic historians, recounts the fateful encounter when the Prime Minister of France shook things up:

Briand, the French Prime Minister, was less calm. He had protected Joffre from criticism in the Chamber. He appropriated clearly that the fall of Verdun would be followed by the fall of his Government. On the evening of 24 February Briand motored to Chantilly. Joffre was already in bed asleep. Briand insisted on his being pulled out of bed – for the only time in [121/122] the war. Staff officers tried to explain that Verdun was of no importance; indeed they would be glad to be rid of it. Briand, usually so conciliatory, lost his temper. He shouted:

'You may not think losing Verdun a defeat, but everyone else will. If you surrender Verdun, you will be cowards, and I'll sack the lot of you.'

«Joffre still apparently half-asleep, let the storm blow on his subordinates. Then opening his eyes, he said softly:

'The Prime Minister is right. I agree with him. No retreat at Verdun. We fight to the end.'

«A strange scene. Joffre had been on the point of making a sensible decision for the first time. The political chief intervened, again for the first time; and Joffre made the wrong one. The French fell in into Falkenhayn's trap.

A.J.P. Taylor, *The First World War: An Illustrated History* (Penguin Books, 1966, rpt 1976), p. 121-2.



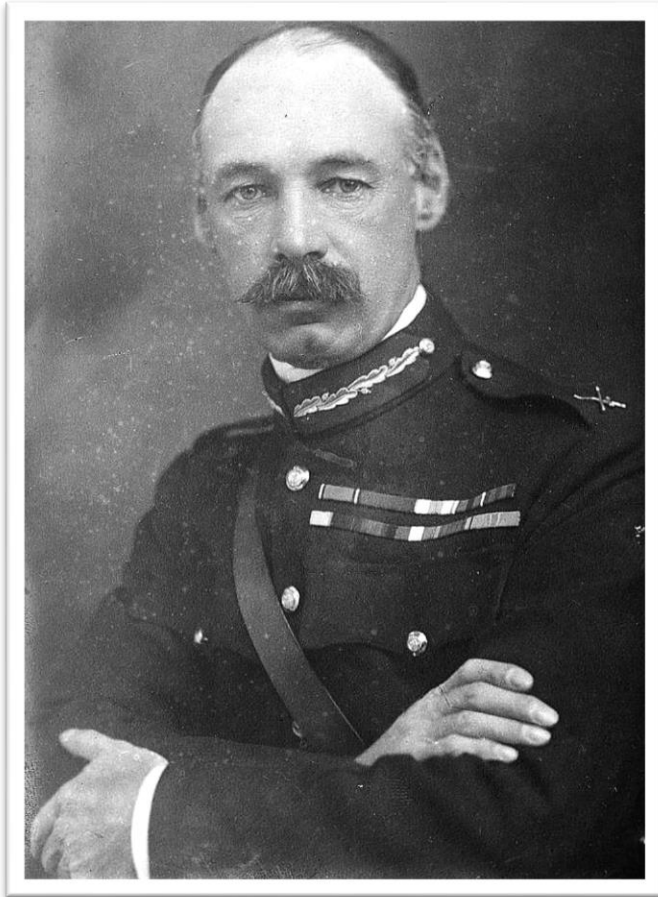
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25 February 1916

Rawlinson's The Man



General Sir Henry Rawlinson

In the winter of 1916, British and French staffs were jointly planning the Somme offensive in view of a late-June «Big Push».

A key British decision was who would command the north flank of this campaign.

An initial suggestion was for General Allenby of the Third Army to take charge. But, this did not take into account the seniority of General Rawlinson, who was also in the Somme region commanding the Fourth Army.

General Haig's dilemma of whom to choose was resolved when the French Tenth Army was slated to leave the Somme to provide support at Verdun.

Allenby took over the formerly French-held ground, near Arras, while Rawlinson took charge of the whole Somme front, more to the south.

On **25 February 1916**, General Rawlinson arrived at his command headquarters at Querrieu and began Fourth Army's detailed planning.

At this stage the British part of the Somme plan was still smaller than the French contribution.

But because of Verdun, this was about to change.

Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson. The Somme. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p 35-47.



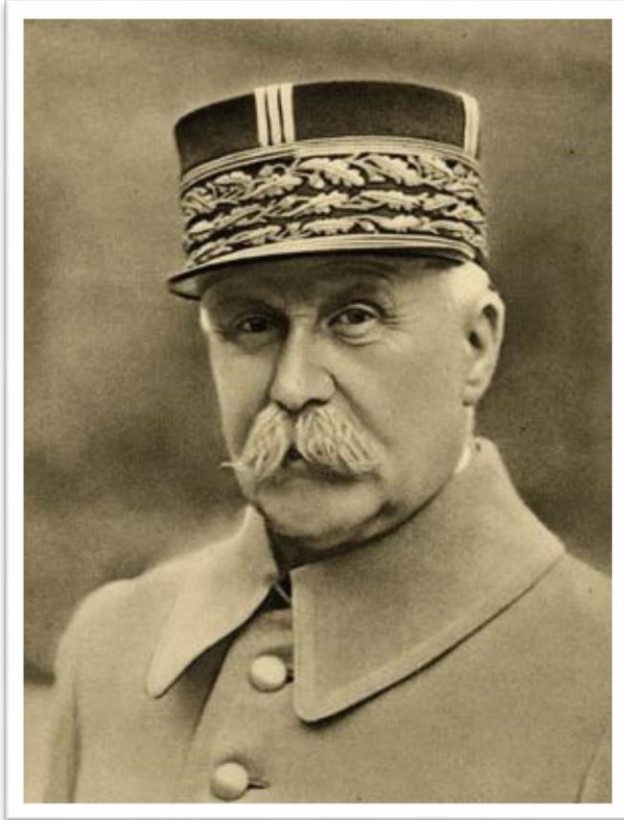
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26 February 1916

Pétain enters the cauldron



Philippe Pétain appointed to command at Verdun

With the realization that the German offensive in Verdun is indeed a major campaign, and that the French Government is adamant that it must be resisted there, Joffre takes action to defend.

His telegram of the 25th February to the officers is clear:

YESTERDAY, FEBRUARY 24, GAVE THE ORDER TO RESIST ON THE RIGHT BANK OF THE MEUSE TO THE N. OF VERDUN. EVERY COMMANDER, WHO, UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, GIVES AN ORDER TO RETREAT, WILL BE ARRAIGNED BEFORE A COUNCIL OF WAR.

On 26 February 1916, Joffre also calls in Army General **Philippe Pétain**, the Commander of Second French Army, to reorganize the Verdun Command and direct operations. The Germans have so far poured nearly two million artillery shells on the French forts and hills before the city. Second and Tenth Army are thus pulled out of the front line so as to reorganize the French Front and concentrate on the defence on the Meuse.



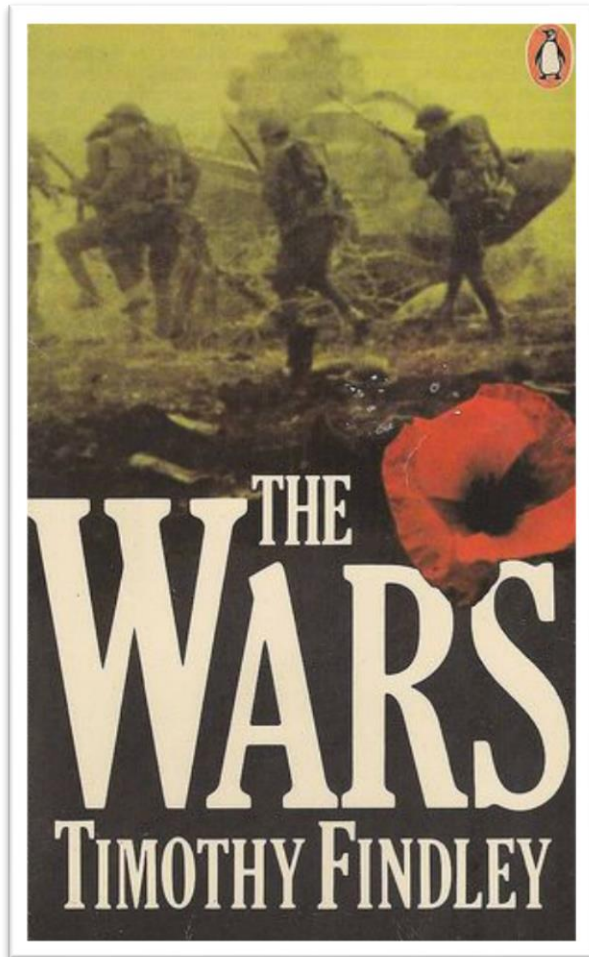
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27 February 1916

Canadian Fiction



Timothy Findley's Canadian novel

While they relax in a well-made dugout, near Ypres, around **27 February 1916**, the fictional character of **Sub-Lieutenant Levitt**, a subaltern in an artillery battery in the novel by **Timothy Findley**, **The Wars**, says he joined the Canadian Field Artillery (CFA) not because of the guns.

'[...] man to man combat is the only true test of what we're doing here. No one's going to prove anything by firing off guns.'

'I hope you don't live to regret that' said Devlin pleasantly. 'If the artillery's an absurdity, Levitt,' said Bonnycastle, 'what are you doing in the C.F.A.?''

'I wanted to join the cavalry, but the cavalry is sort of on the outs. The only other place I could be with horses was in the Field Artillery.'

'You like horses, eh?' said Rodwell. 'Yessir,' said Levitt. (Rodwell was a Captain.) 'Well, then—' said Rodwell—smoothing the waters. 'Any man whose love of horses is stronger than his fear of being an absurdity is all right with me.' And he put out his hand. 'How do you do?'

Findley, The Wars, (Clarke Irwin, 1977; Penguin, 1978, Rpt 1986), p. 99-100.



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28 February 1916

Verdun: Scene of Liquid Fire



Flamethrowers at Verdun

The first actual battlefield combat use of the flamethrower came on 4-5 October 1914 against French troops in the Argonne.¹

By February 1916 the German Stormtroopers had evolved into a formal organization with a man-portable flamethrower wielded by men of the 3rd Guard Pioneer Battalion.²

Between 21 February and 27 April 1916 no fewer than 57 flamethrower attacks were carried out by a force of ten flamethrower companies, who in total had 400 flamethrower weapons.³

¹ Chris McNab, The Flamethrower, (2015), page 40; Thomas Victor, German Flamethrower Pioneers of World War I, (2007), p. 27.

² William Martin, Verdun 1916, (2004), p. 18.

³ McNab, The Flamethrower, p. 44.



29 February 1916

Back to Submarine Havoc



Grand Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz

After the *Lusitania* sinking in May 1915, Germany ceased unrestricted submarine warfare in the face of strong American pressure. From the beginning of 1916, Chief of the General Staff Falkenhayn told Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg that he could not guarantee victory on land; blockade of the British isles was necessary. Falkenhayn was supported by **Grand Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz** who optimistically stated that the submarine blockade would force Britain's surrender within two months.

Bethmann Hollweg was unconvinced; he thought there were too few U-boats and feared US reaction. Pressure from the General Staff, Tirpitz and the public forced him to acquiesce.

«Intensified submarine warfare (against armed merchant shipping)» began on **29 February 1916** and a debate raged among the German leadership regarding expansion of the campaign to unrestricted submarine warfare against neutrals and renewed no-warning attacks.

Fritz Fischer, Germany's War Aims in the First World War, p. 285-6.



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