

World War I
Day by Day
1915 – 1918

March 1916 / mars 1916

La première guerre mondiale
De jour en jour
1915 – 1918



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1 March 1916

The Plunketts find the limelight



Cpl. Al Plunkett and Capt. Mert Plunkett: The start of the Dumbells

The lull which eventually lasted nine months, in 1915-1916, for Canadian troops along the front lines in Flanders, created the right environment for stage entertainers to ply their trade.

There were talents in the Canadian Corps searching for limelight, and there was a captive audience, away from city entertainment, eager to turn it on.

The PPCLI was reputed to be early off the mark in putting together a stage troop of entertainers in the funny style. They were the PPCLI's Comedy Company. Their impromptu shows which started early in 1916 within the unit rapidly gained notoriety in Third Division.

With the encouragement of the Division Commander, two leaders emerged, **Captain Mert Plunkett** and his brother **Corporal Al Plunkett**, who created the more elaborate Canadian Army Third Division Concert Party.

They soon became very well known as The Dumbells.

Legion, March/April 2005. <https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/gramophone/028011-1007.1-e.html>



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2 March 1916

Le Capitaine Charles De Gaulle est fait prisonnier



Dans les ruines du village de Douaumont, le troisième bataillon du 33e régiment d'infanterie de l'armée française fut totalement anéanti par l'offensive de l'armée allemande. Lors des combats, une unité d'assaut reçoit la reddition de la 10^e compagnie et de son chef, **le capitaine Charles De Gaulle**.

Le 2 mars 1916, l'artillerie lourde allemande a commencé un bombardement massif avant que ne s'engage le combat au corps à corps et au gaz. La compagnie que de Gaulle commandait a été presque entièrement anéantie. Lui-même reçoit un coup de baïonnette et perd connaissance. Son nom figure parmi les disparus. Deux mois plus tard, le 7 mai 1916, la citation précise:



Le capitaine de Gaulle, commandant de compagnie, réputé pour sa haute valeur intellectuelle et morale, alors que son bataillon, subissant un effroyable bombardement, était décimé et que les Allemands atteignaient sa compagnie de tous côtés, a envoyé ses hommes dans un assaut furieux et un corps à corps farouche, seule solution qu'il jugeait compatible avec son sentiment de l'honneur militaire. Est tombé dans la mêlée. Officier hors de pair à tous égards.

<http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/pages/l-homme/dossiers-thematiques/1890-1940-la-genese/la-grande-guerre/reperes/chronologie-1909-1918.php>

<http://www.verdun-meuse.fr/index.php?qs=fr/lieux-et-visites/lieu-du-mois---mars-2012---le-village-detruit>



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3 March 1916

From Kitchener to Rawlinson



The volunteers of Kitchener's Army go to France

Given the numbers of casualties during 1914 and 1915, Britain had lost most of the men that belonged to the pre-war Regular army.

Many that now join the new Fourth Field Army belong to all-volunteer units raised in haste by Lord Kitchener's recruiting drive.

Division and Corps commands sent down instruction for training to take two forms:

rehearsal attacks over models of enemy trench systems; and

training to fight in trench systems.

Experience in these units is very shallow. Coupled with a strong British tradition of independent regimental personality, there is a tendency to be suspicious of imposed doctrine. Actual training varies considerably from unit to unit.

Following the Battle of the Somme, there will be a significant training review which will put more emphasis on standardization of junior officer leadership.

Bruce Gudmundsun, [The British Expeditionary Force 1914-15](#). Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, [The Somme](#).



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4 March 1916

Franz Marc et Blaue Reiter



Le peintre allemand Franz Marc

Le 4 mars 1916, meurt à Braquis (près de Verdun) **Franz Marc** (né le 8 février 1880 à Munich), lors d'une reconnaissance à cheval...

C'est l'un des principaux représentants de l'expressionnisme allemand.

Peintre animalier, graveur, pastelliste, aquarelliste, lithographe, écrivain, il fonde, avec Wassily Kandinsky le groupe «*Der Blaue Reiter* » (Le cavalier bleu), nom qui est adopté en 1911 comme mouvement par un groupe de peintres de Munich, avec le désir commun de rénover le langage artistique.

En 1914, la guerre met fin abrupte au *Blaue Reiter*.

La tendance à concevoir l'art comme l'expression de la rébellion subjective contre la réalité, motif commun à toutes les avant-gardes occidentales du XXe siècle, trouva temporairement en Allemagne dans le *Blaue Reiter* son expression exaspérée.



<http://www.franz--marc.com/>
<https://www.verdun14-18.de/?p=4561>



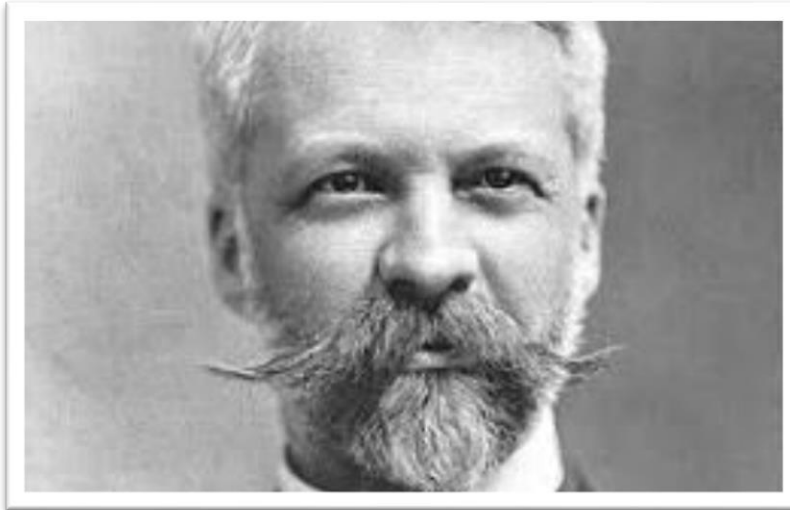
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5 March 1916

Bourassa six lectures to the Bishops



Henri Bourassa – Canadian politician and journalist (1 Sept 1868 - 31 Aug 1952)

Starting on 2 March, **Henri Bourassa** gives six weekly lectures on Hier, aujourd'hui et demain, covering Canadian constitutional history.

It is clear in these lectures that Bourassa is a Canadian isolationist and secularist.

He faults the Catholic bishops for their stance on imperialism and their concerted influence to the favor of recruitment.

We have here a little coterie of Tory and imperialist priests who invoke the interests of religion in order to serve the ends of England and of the Canadian imperialists. These same people also exploit the French-Canadians' love of France, after having denounced her for years as the most impious and corrupt country in the world.

Also coming out is the continued resentment against the Ontario Regulation 17, which he sees as a betrayal at home which should nullify any interest for French Canadians to go overseas under the flag.

Wade, M. (1968). The French-Canadians, 692-3.



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6 March 1916

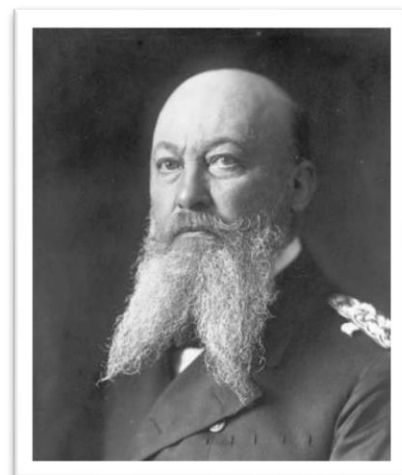
The Submarine Warfare Conundrum



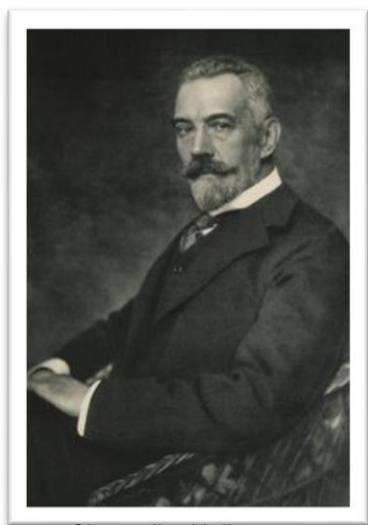
General Falkenhayn

At the end of the month of February 1916, **General Falkenhayn**, the Chief of the German Imperial General Staff has made it clear to the **Kaiser, Wilhelm II**, that he could not guarantee the success of the armies of the Central Powers if Unconditional Submarine Warfare was not declared, including against neutral shipping.

Admiral von Tirpitz, the Grand Admiral of the German Navy, was eager to resume Unconditional Submarine Warfare, which had been suspended by the Kaiser in 1915 because of considerations of international diplomatic relations



Admiral von Tirpitz



Chancellor Hollweg

Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg is adamant that Unconditional Submarine Warfare is suicidal as it will bring in the United States into the War.

On 6 March 1916, the Kaiser decides that there will not be Unconditional Submarine Warfare for now, but that the Chancellor has three months to work out a diplomatic plan to ensure that the international reaction to the implementation of Unconditional Submarine Warfare will be positive.



Kaiser Wilhelm II

Von Tirpitz made the mistake of calling his fleet of submarines to be ready for Unconditional Submarine Warfare for 1 April 1916. He is enraged by the decision of the Kaiser to postpone. He offers his resignation.

And it is accepted.



7 March 1916

La bataille de Mort-Homme



Images de la bataille du Mort-Homme

Le 6 mars 1916, les Allemands pilonnent et attaquent le Mort-homme sur la rive gauche (de la Meuse), mais le feu français les arrête.

Cette "bataille dans la bataille" va durer jusqu'au 15 mars. Au cours de ces dix jours, le site est transformé en désert.

Simultanément, **le 7 mars 1916**, les Allemands lancent une offensive sur la rive droite, à partir de Douaumont. On se massacre dans les ruines de Douaumont qui est pris et repris 13 fois.

Le saillant de Verdun se transforme en une boucherie. Le fer, le feu, la boue forment la triade infernale composant la vie du « poilu », mais aussi celle du « troufion » allemand. Pétain réclame des renforts à Joffre. Mais ce dernier privilégie sa future offensive sur la Somme...

[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bataille de Verdun %281916%29](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bataille_de_Verdun_%281916%29)

<http://cote304.563creations.fr/>

<http://www.lesfrancaisaverdun-1916.fr/histo-verdun-detaille2.htm>

<http://www.verdun-meuse.fr/index.php?qs=fr/lieux-et-visites/monument-du-mois---avril-2012---monument-du-m>



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8 March 1916

Verdun: Vaux under attack



The Fortresses of Douaumont and Vaux

On 8 March 1916, the Germans attacked on the east bank of the Meuse. The aim of attack was the fortress of Vaux.

The German attack was immediately put to a stop by heavy French gunfire.

One authority, the French General Palat, claims that the fortunate destruction of all the German Krupp 42 cm howitzers by the French 75 mm guns, and the blowing up of an artillery park near Spincourt, which held 450 000 heavy shell unwisely kept fused, was decisive.

Hart, L. History of the First World War, (1970), p. 293.

Herwig, H.H. The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary 1914-1918, (1997), p. 72.



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9 March 1916

The Birth of Attrition as a Strategic Concept



Later explanations of the Battle of Verdun have asserted that the operation as conceived by General Faulkenhayn was to «bleed France white». But the initial attacks by the Germans were obviously launched so as to gain ground and penetrate the French defense lines.

When the all-out attempts of 21 February to 9 March 1916 proved inconclusive, the attitude of the German High Command changed.

Not being able to force an entry, they decided that 'bleeding France white' would take place *in situ*. The battle had become so crucial in German public view that it could not be stopped without results. Killing the French as they poured into the Verdun defence became a new strategy with the name of Attrition.

Historian Basil Liddell Hart says:

From March 9th onward, there can be no question that the German policy was primarily attrition, and that so far as Verdun was aimed at it was as a moral objective.

Liddell Hart, The First World War, Chap 6, Scene 1: The Mincing Machine – Verdun.



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10 March 1916

Le Kaiser supporte Pancho Villa



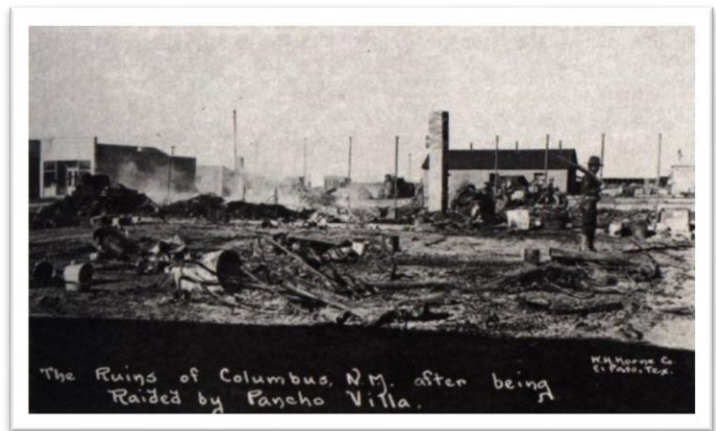
Francisco «Pancho» Villa

Dans la nuit du 8 au 9 mars 1916, «**Pancho**» **Villa**, le révolutionnaire mexicain, conduit 1500 hommes dans un raid contre le village américain de Columbus, Nouveau-Mexique, où était cantonné un détachement du 13^e Régiment de cavalerie américain.

Contre la promesse de 800,000 marks, des agents allemands auraient persuadé le leader mexicain d'attaquer une ville frontière des États-Unis. Mais Villa ne participa pas personnellement à ce raid, considéré comme la première attaque militaire sur le sol américain.

Le Kaiser Guillaume II cherchait ainsi à créer des problèmes frontaliers entre le Mexique et les États-Unis pour retarder l'intervention des troupes américaines en Europe.

En représailles, le président américain Woodrow Wilson lança une expédition punitive de 10,000 hommes, commandée par le général John Pershing, au Mexique, mais qui ne réussit pas à capturer le chef mexicain qui est dès lors recherché, «mort ou vif», avec récompense.



https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bataille_de_Columbus

<http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/pancho-villa-attacks-columbus-new-mexico>



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11 March 1916

Joffre à Verdun



Joffre visite Pétain à Verdun

Dans la matinée du **11 mars 1916**, le général Joffre vient rendre visite au commandant de la Deuxième Armée dans sa mairie à Souilly.

Après une journée d'entretien, Joffre promet de faire son possible pour alimenter Verdun en canons, malgré les besoins pour la bataille de la Somme, qu'il prépare comme contre-offensive.

Joffre rédige le premier ordre du jour historique de la bataille :

Soldats de l'armée de Verdun ! Depuis trois semaines, vous subissez le plus formidable assaut que l'ennemi ait encore tenté contre nous. [. . .] La lutte n'est pas encore terminée car les Allemands ont besoin d'une victoire. Vous saurez leur arracher. Nous avons des munitions en abondance et de nombreuses réserves. Mais vous avez surtout votre indomptable courage et votre foi dans la République. Le pays a les yeux sur vous. Vous serez de ceux dont on dira : 'Ils ont barré aux Allemands la route de Verdun !'

(Ordre du jour pour la journée du 11 mars)

<http://www.lesfrancaisaverdun-1916.fr/theme-grands-hommes.htm>

<http://rha.revues.org/4122>



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12 March 1916

The Somme offensive suddenly becomes a counter-offensive



At the fateful Chantilly conference of December 1915, the Allies have decided to launch an enormous multi-front offensive in the early summer.

But they have now been pre-empted by the German surprise in Verdun.

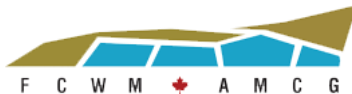
The operation being prepared with massive resources has now been turned into a desperate counter-offensive, with the aim of extricating the French from their bloody predicament.

The plan causes disagreement among the British. Strong voices in government are reluctant to launch another mass offensive against defensive positions that have already proven impregnable.

But the British High Command argues again that the best way to defend Britain is to regain the initiative in France. **General William Robertson**, the British Chief of the Imperial General Staff, pushes his constitutional prerogative – as well as his Conservative support, to the limit, boldly reiterating at the French headquarters, on **12 March 1916**, that the British will be ready in time for the «Big Push».

This is early to be so sure: he still does not have his bird in hand.

Corrigan, G. Mud, Blood and Poppycock (Cassell, 2004), p. 251.



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13 March 1916

Admiral Von Capelle: Wilhelm's dagger in the sheath



Admiral Eduard von Capelle replaces
Admiral Tirpitz as Secretary of State for the Navy

The Great builder of the German Navy, Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, resigned in hanger a few days ago because of the refusal by the Kaiser to authorize Unrestricted Submarine warfare. Tirpitz was convinced that he could bring the war to an end if given free hand with the submarine fleet to sink any ship at sight.

The Kaiser has now reached out to a retired Admiral who is more amenable to the political imperatives of the moment.

Admiral Eduard von Capelle is more sensitive to the argument of the Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, that open warfare against the United States shipping would be disastrous.

But Capelle keeps his dagger at hand. Wilhelm has instructed the Chancellor to force the door through diplomacy and ensure that Unrestricted warfare at sea become acceptable to 'neutral' Wilson.

Von Capelle will have his turn at a *'coup d'épée dans l'eau.'*

Wikipedia, «Eduard von Capelle».



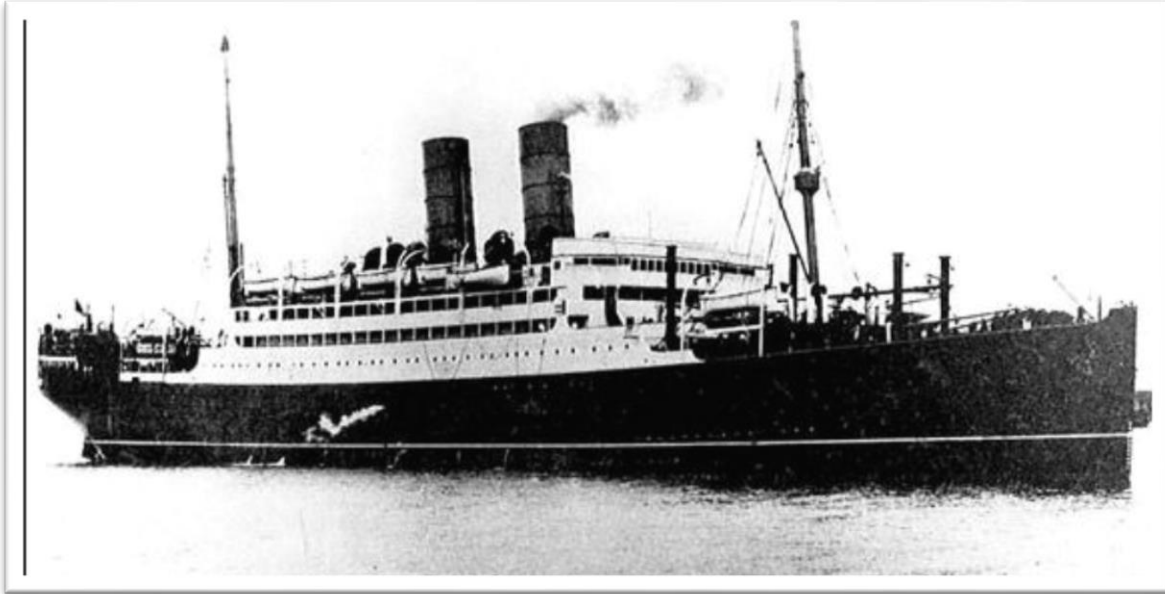
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14 March 1916

The Newfoundlanders sail out of Egypt



The HMT Alania and the Newfoundland Regiment leave Egypt

On March 14, 1916 reveille for the Newfoundland Regiment was at 0500. After breakfast, the Regiment struck camp about 0730, for the last time in Egypt, and marched four miles to Port Tewfik where the Suez Canal enters the Red Sea.

The Regiment boarded **H.M.T. Alania**, a 13,000 tons Cunarder at 1300 for Marseille, France.

The Newfoundland Regiment embarked with a strength of 23 Officers and 560 other ranks. The Alania also carried three other infantry battalions of the 29th Division. The Alania left Port Tewfik at 4:15 pm and started up the Canal at 6:30 pm.

She will reach Marseille on March 22 and the Newfoundlanders will eventually be billeted at Buigny l'Abbé for the remaining days of March to 'continue training'.

Nicholson, G.W.L. Fighting Newfoundlander, (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1964, reprint 2006), p. 233-235.

Facey-Crowther, D.R. Lieutenant Owen William Steele of the Newfoundland Regiment, (McGill-Queens, 2002), p. 148-149.



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15 March 1916

One less sideshow: Re-organization of British Forces in the Middle East



In early 1916, the beaten Mediterranean Expeditionary Force arrived in Egypt from Gallipoli.

At the same time, the British Force was preparing for a second Turkish attack on the canal.

The War Office ordered the consolidation of these two forces into the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Murray took command on **15 March 1916**.



British 18-pounder gun on sand wheels in defence of the Canal.

Murray was a very capable administrator. He reconstituted the battered Gallipoli divisions, trained replacements and established logistics for the restructured defence of the Canal.

Murray estimated that 250,000 Turks threatened Egypt; the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir William Robertson, disagreed. In his mandate letter to Murray, the CIGS stated that Murray was to “keep Egypt reasonably secure,” maintain a reserve for India and “get everyone else to France.”

Bruce, A. *The Last Crusade: The Palestinian Campaign in the First World War*.



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16 March 1916

Galliéni laisse le Ministère

Le 16 mars 1916, le **Général Joseph Galliéni** (Maréchal de France) démissionne comme ministre français de la guerre. Il est remplacé par le général Roques.

Gouverneur militaire de Paris en 1914, il contribue à la victoire de la Marne, avant de devenir un très efficace ministre de la Guerre. Durant son ministère il accomplit malgré la maladie un labeur écrasant. Il a une vision claire du bénéfice que tireraient les Alliés de l'ouverture du front balkanique. Il s'oppose à l'expédition des Dardanelles, mais il n'est pas écouté. Il alerte le grand quartier général, le 16 décembre 1915, des menaces sérieuses qui pèsent sur Verdun et prescrit un renforcement des défenses. Joffre n'en tient pas compte et, le 21 février, les Allemands se ruent à l'attaque de la forteresse désarmée.

Miné par la maladie, épuisé par quarante-huit années de service et de campagne, il obtient d'être relevé de ses fonctions après avoir jeté ses dernières forces dans son «testament» terrible, note sur le haut commandement.

Le 27 mai, il expirera à l'hôpital auxiliaire n° 17 de Versailles. Homme de caractère, Galliéni refuse d'être inhumé aux Invalides et demande à reposer près de sa compagne qui l'a quitté le 27 juillet 1914 au moment où il est appelé à Paris et sur la tombe de laquelle il n'a même pas eu le temps de se recueillir.



Général Joseph Galliéni

<http://www.rfi.fr/%20tirailleurs/20100317-le-general-joseph-gallieni-marechal-france-1849-1916>
<http://cavaliers.blindes.free.fr/profils/gallieni.html>
<http://www.crid1418.org/temoins/2008/07/26/gallieni-joseph-1849-1916/>



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17 March 1916

Appolinaire est blessé

Le 17 mars 1916, la guerre est terminée pour Guillaume Apollinaire: il est blessé d'un éclat d'obus à la tempe, au bois des Buttes, près de La Ville-aux-Bois (Aisne), huit jours après avoir obtenu la nationalité française par décret.



Guillaume de Kostrowitzky, Apollinaire

De son vrai nom **Guillaume de Kostrowitzky**, **Appolinaire** est considéré comme l'un des poètes français les plus importants du début du XX^e siècle, auteur de poèmes tels que «Zone», «La Chanson du mal-aimé», «Mai» ou encore «Le Pont Mirabeau».

Affecté au 38^{ème} régiment d'artillerie de campagne basé à Nîmes, il part pour le front de Champagne le 4 avril 1915 où il est nommé brigadier quelques jours plus tard, puis maréchal des logis le 24 août suivant.

À sa demande, il est muté dans l'infanterie le 20 novembre 1915 et rejoint alors le 96^{ème} R.I. avec le grade de sous-lieutenant, toujours en Champagne.

De cette période militaire, il reste un recueil de poésies intitulé «Poèmes à Lou», correspondance échangée avec une jeune femme rencontrée à Nice, et à qui il écrira jusqu'en janvier 1916.

Double ironie du sort, il décède deux jours avant l'Armistice, de la grippe espagnole, et il est inhumé le 12 novembre 1918, à Paris, alors que la capitale est en liesse.

See:

<http://www.picardie1418.com/fr/transversales/guillaume-apollinaire-a-combattu-en-1916-en-picardie.php>

<http://www.guillaume-apollinaire.fr/>



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18 March 1916

The futile battle of Narotch



The Chantilly Agreement of December 1915 committed France, Britain, Russia and Italy to simultaneous offensives in the summer of 1916.

The German offensive at Verdun forced Marechal Joffre to invoke the spirit of Chantilly in requesting a Russian offensive in the east to divert German divisions from Verdun.

Czar Nicholas II consented and selected the sector where Russian numerical superiority offered the best prospects – 872,000 Russians against 82,000 Germans.

Russia had largely overcome its shell shortage; 887 guns opened a two-day barrage against the Germans in the Lake Narotch area. Failure to reconnoitre meant that German artillery batteries and trenches were unharmed by the “most futile” barrage of the entire war.

The offensive was an utter failure: it cost Russia 100,000 casualties, exposed the bankruptcy of the high command and condemned the Russians to months of passivity.

Stone, N. *The Eastern Front 1914-1917*



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19 March 1916

Bombardements aériens de Habsheim (Alsace)



Avion allemand (Fokker E. III)

Une escadrille française du Groupe de bombardiers N°4 de Belfort bombarde la gare de la Wanne (Mulhouse/ Riedisheim) et l'aérodrome d'Habsheim.

Ils sont pris en chasse par 12 avions allemands, ce qui fut qualifié par la presse allemande de premier combat aérien mondial entre deux formations.

Jusqu'à ce jour, hormis d'escarmouches de moindre importance, les batailles aériennes se résumaient souvent à des bombardements d'usines.

Suite à ces raids, quatre avions allemands (Fokker E.III) décollent d'Habsheim, le **19 mars 1916**, pour aller bombarder le terrain de Belfort d'où décollent la plupart des avions français.

N'ayant pas pu atteindre leur objectif, ils larguent leurs bombes sur un village des alentours du terrain, occasionnant des morts civils.

En guise de représailles, les aviateurs français reçoivent l'ordre de détruire le terrain allemand.

Dans la guerre des airs, les échanges se font dorénavant contre les installations aériennes au sol.

See:

<http://www.achr.asso.fr/vav/historique.html>

<http://icaruswings.unblog.fr/2015/01/18/le-fokker-e-iii-10515-ernst-udet-kek-habsheim-1916/>

<http://www.asoublies1418.fr/>



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20 March 1916

Royal Naval Air Service raids German base in Belgium



RNAS bomber at work

Although the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) – the air arm of the British Army in the First World War – retains a place in the popular historical imagination to this day, its naval counterpart, the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS), is less well remembered.

On **20 March 1916** the bombers of 5 Wing RNAS based at Dover, together with French and Belgian formations, attacked German air assets on the Belgian coast near Bruges including a seaplane base at the port of Zeebrugge and an aerodrome at Houtave.

The RNAS and RFC will continue to operate as independent, rival arms until they will be amalgamated to form the Royal Air Force (RAF) on 1 April 1918.

Bartlett, P. *In the Teeth of the Wind: Memoirs of the Royal Naval Air Service in the First World War*, (London: Pen & Sword, Leo Cooper, [Ian Allan, 1974] 2004), p. 15.



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21 March 1916

Punching at Vimy Ridge: The British loose the grip

The French have hammered Vimy Ridge since the beginning of the war.

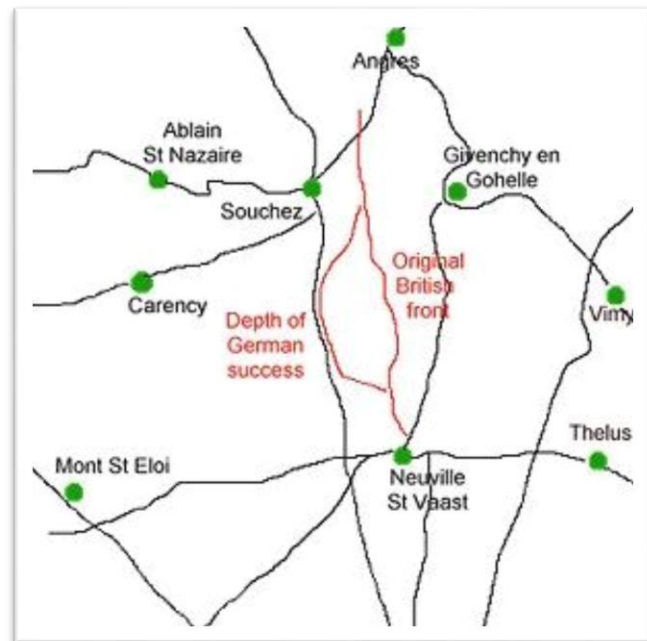
During the offensive of Artois, in 1915, the ridge was the central target of repeated assaults by the French Tenth Army, which succeeded only by costly steps to get near the foot of this ominous Golgotha.

The relentless advances through Ablais-St.Nazaire, the 'Labyrinth', Neuville Saint-Vast, and the sacrificial assaults by the Zouaves, in the slopes of Souchez and Hauteurs de Lorette, in the north, were excruciating.

Now the *Dixième Armée* has been pulled out of the Arras sector so as to be moved closer to Verdun. The British Third Army is being extended south to replace the French at the foot of the Vimy feature. But the British are not familiar with the site.

On 21 March 1916, the Germans make a sudden punchy attack in which they take back sacred ground still impregnated with French blood.

They gain only 200 yards, but they show the Brits that they can see them...



Macksey, Major K., *The Shadow of the Ridge* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1965), p. 49.



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22 March 1916

The Gotha Prototype takes off



Gotha G II heavy bomber

March 1916 saw the first flight and testing of one of the first successful heavy bombers, **the Gotha G II**, a twin-engine biplane weighing 3200 kg at its maximum takeoff weight.

It carried 500 kg of bombs and two machine guns for self-defence, with a crew of three.

The Gotha II was powered by two Mercedes D.IV series engines mounted with pusher propellers. The first prototype could not carry the specified bomb load to the required range; the wing was re-designed and production of eleven examples followed beginning in March. Their combat effectiveness was hampered by frequent crankshaft failures of the Mercedes engines.

The significance of the Gotha II is that it was the first series of what became one of the Imperial German Air Service's most effective bombers produced in over 200 examples and used extensively in raids on London.

See WW1Aviation.com



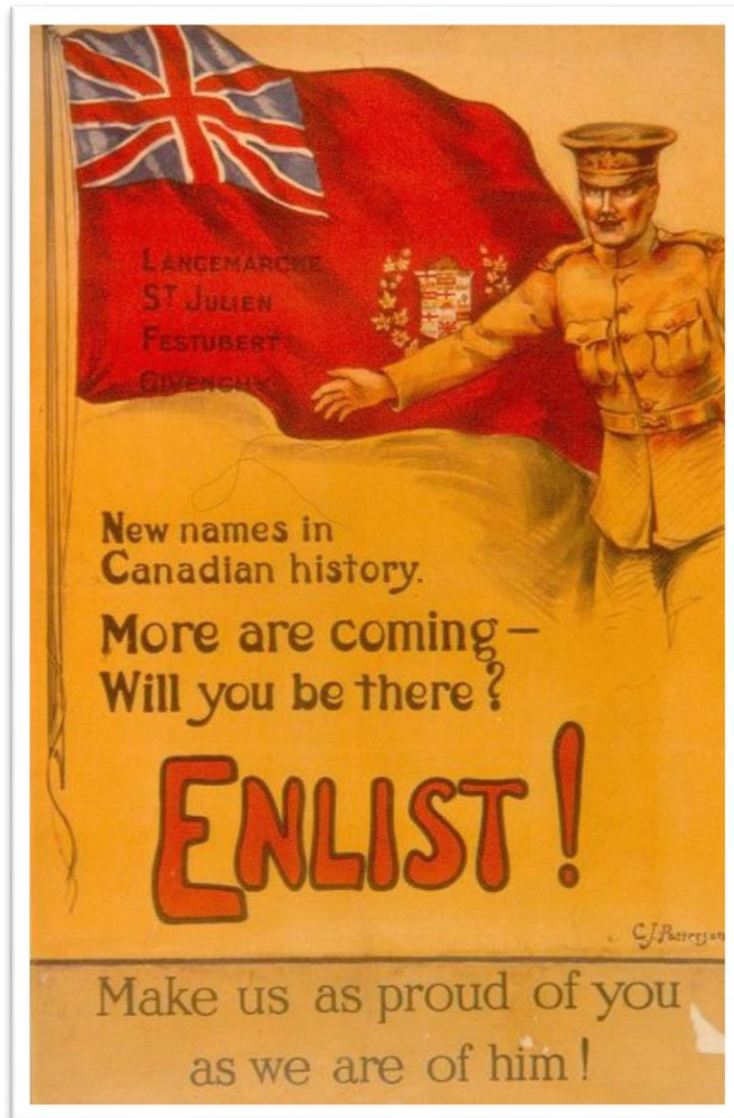
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23 March 1916

Canadian Recruitment Roaring



The month of March 1916 will stand as the peak month in Canadian recruiting at 34,913 men enlisted. It will go down to 5,200 in December!

But discrepancies in recruiting figures across the country are becoming evident. Recruiting shows large differences in successes across the country. This creates resentment among those seen to be more willing to serve.

In his famous Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, O.D. Skelton discusses the factors that affect the recruitment across the nation and gives substantial explanations on the effects of those factors.

Differences such as rural vs urban recruitment, religious attitudes, and the British origin of recruits, in particular those of late arrival, are highly influential on ratios of recruitment to population.

Quebec is differentiated from Ontario in that it has only two cities, and its population is much more rural than in Ontario, where British-rooted population is more urban, with smaller families and later marriage. Attachment to European roots is also much lesser among French Canadians.

Skelton. O.D. Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, The Carleton Library No. 21, 1965, Rprt 1971). With Introduction by General Editor David M.L. Farr.



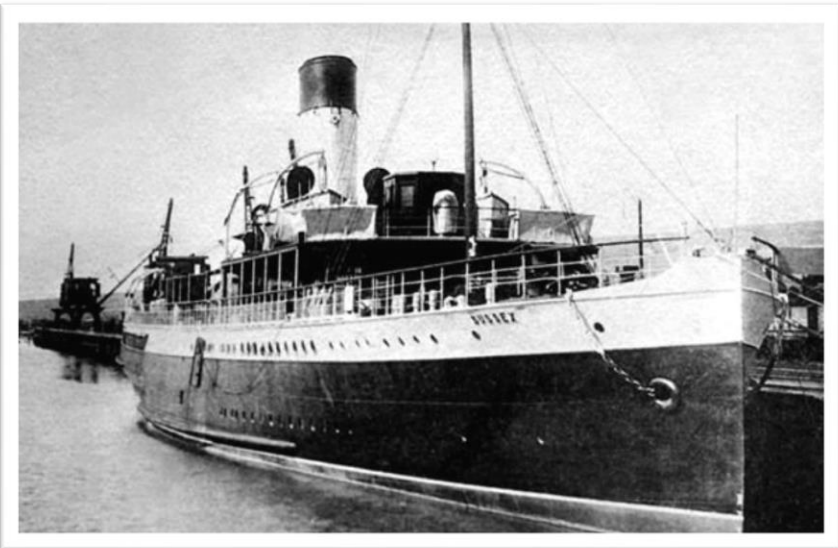
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24 March 1916

S.S. Sussex sunk in the Channel with American passengers



SS Sussex before attack

On 24 March 1916, the German submarine UB-29 torpedoed the civilian channel ferry, the **SS Sussex**, owned by the French *Etat* railway.

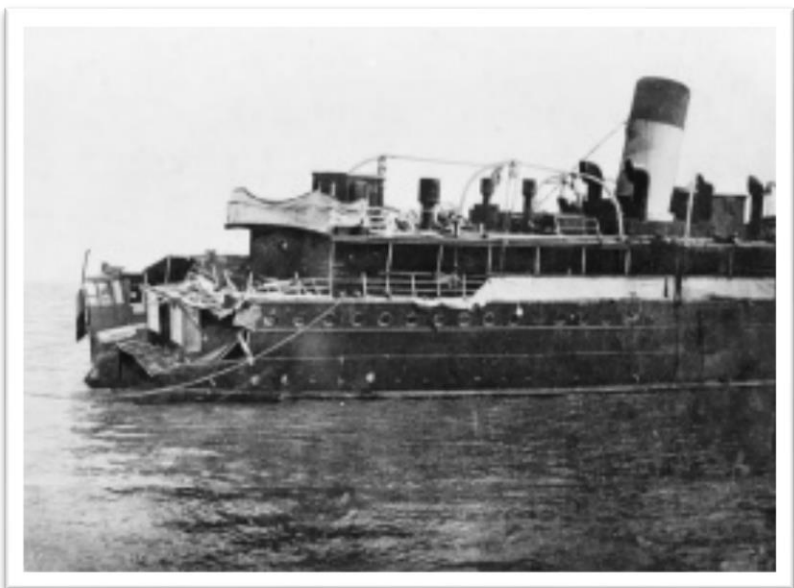
It carried 53 crew and 325 passengers on the Folkestone to Dieppe crossing when attacked.

The torpedo destroyed the bow of the ship, as far back as the bridge; 50 passengers at least were killed and many injured, two

of whom were US citizens. The *Sussex* was towed into Boulogne where it was repaired.

The attack, which came after the 29 February resumption of expanded submarine warfare, enraged opinion in the United States because American citizens were among the injured.

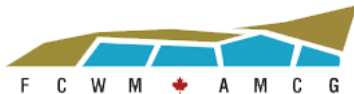
A sharp exchange of diplomatic correspondence between the US and Germany will validate Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg's concern that expanded submarine warfare risks drawing the US into the war.



SS Sussex after attack

Fischer, F. *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, Chap 9, «Germany and the United States: Submarine Warfare and the Belgian question», p. 280-309, esp. 287.

TIMES History of the War, (1917), Chap. 177, «The End of American Neutrality», Vol. XI: p. 356-96, esp. p. 363, Illustr.



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25 March 1916

T.E. Lawrence on assignment to Mesopotamia



Capt. T.E. Lawrence

With Kut besieged, the War Committee feared another humiliation soon after Gallipoli.

Another Ottoman victory risked provoking a pan-Islamic uprising in India and the Arab world.

Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, proposed two measures to rectify the situation.

The first was for British agents to foment an Arab revolt behind Turkish lines and thereby relieve the pressure in Mesopotamia.

The second was to identify a suitably corrupt Ottoman commander and pay a massive bribe to allow General Townshend's force to retreat from Kut.

Kitchener asked the Cairo Military Intelligence Office to identify their best man for these missions. Not surprisingly, no senior officer wished to risk his career on such an ill-conceived assignment.

So in **late March** a relatively low ranking officer, **Captain T. E. Lawrence**, took on the challenge.

Rogan, E. *The Fall of the Ottomans*



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26 March 1916

Lieutenant General Alderson is in trouble



On 26 March 1916, Lieutenant General Alderson, the British commander of the Canadian Corps, meets **Max Aitken**, the very influential «Canadian Eye Witness» in England, at the Marlborough Club in London.

Aitken has been navigating the very difficult path of being in good terms with Sam Huges, the all-powerful Minister of Militia, and British authorities, who detest Sam Huges as a Canadian nationalist thorn on their side.

In their meeting, Alderson relates to Aitken how he is in great conflict with Sam Huges. The various matters such as the Ross rifle, the shabby Canadian equipment, and the appointment of inexperienced Canadian senior officers to formation command has made their relations rather unhealthy.

Aitken can only conclude that the feud will end in the dismissal of the wrong man...

Gwyn, S. Tapestry of War, Chap 16: «The Destruction of General Alderson», pp. 272-94.



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27 March 1916

The Shell Scandal Explodes in Canada

G.W. Kyte MP pulls the blanket on corruption in shell industry

On March 28, 1916 the Liberal member for Richmond, Nova Scotia, G.W. Kyte rose to speak on the Shell Scandal in Canada.

He referred to enormous profits to American promoters arising from certain fuse and cartridge-case contracts made by the Shell Committee.

Kyte charged that one such promoter, Honorary Colonel J.W. Allison, had used his influence with the Minister of Militia, Sir Sam Hughes, to secure lucrative contracts with the Shell Committee.

Prime Minister Robert Borden will appoint a Royal Commission which will exonerate Hughes and the Shell Committee, but the Commission will strongly censure Allison for deception in his relations with the Minister and the Shell Committee.



Nicholson, G.W.L. Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919, page 207.

Haycock, R. Sam Hughes, (1986), p. 242-243.



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28 March 1916

Haig must draw fire from Verdun



On March 28, 1916, French and English military officials met in Paris to discuss the French situation in Verdun.

The battle had been raging for just over a month, and in that time the French had lost 90,000 men, with tens of thousands more injured. The fortresses were holding, but they desperately needed support from the British Army.

Joffre asked the British High Command to consider some immediate diversionary attacks to the north of the Somme region so as to draw German attention from Verdun without spoiling the surprise of the major Allied counter-campaign in the Somme region.

Lord Kitchener, the Secretary for War, and General Sir William Robertson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported back to the British commander-in-chief, Field Marshal Haig, the following day.

Haig agreed but stated that he would not attack with full strength, except if Paris or France were in danger of falling.

Gilbert, M. The Somme: Heroism and Horror in the First World War, p. 21.



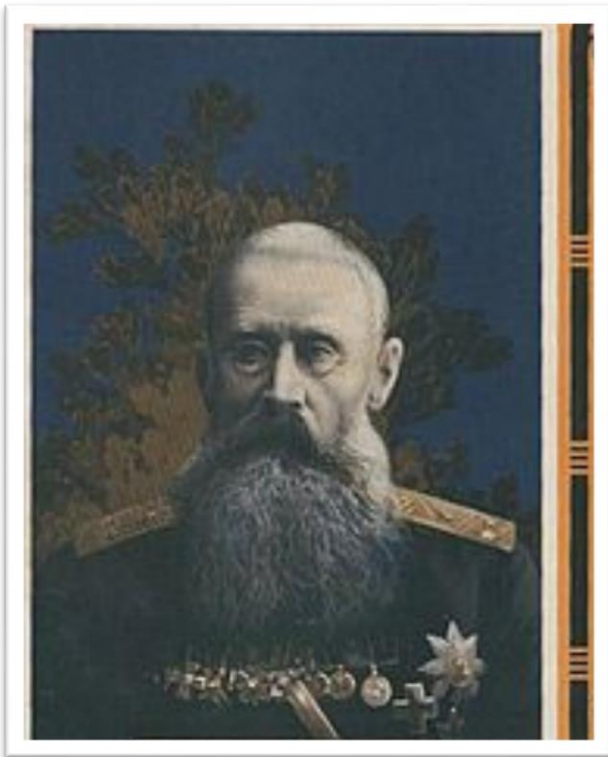
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29 March 1916

Ivanov kicked upstairs: Changes in the Russian High Command



The defeat at Lake Narotch paralysed Russia's army for months. Despite the enormous and futile expenditure of shells in that battle, Russian commanders fell into fatalistic assessments that victory required even more shells.

Nonetheless, there were repercussions for commanders. The commander of the South-Western front, **General Nikolai Ludovich Ivanov** was replaced in March 1916 and essentially kicked upstairs to the Stavka (General Staff) where he became chief military advisor to Czar Nicholas II. His close ties to inner circles of the aristocracy and royal family saved him from outright dismissal.

On the South-Western Front, a more technocratic, younger group of officers was emerging who looked to strategic and tactical innovation rather than simply weight of shell. One of them, General Alexei Alexseevich Brusilov, would give new hope to Russian arms in the coming summer.

Stone, N. *The Eastern Front 1914-1917*



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30 March 1916

En compagnie des mitrailleuses



Les compagnies de mitrailleuses dans chaque brigade canadienne

Le Corps canadien adopte, **fin mars 1916**, une nouvelle doctrine sur l'utilisation des mitrailleuses. Toutes les **Vickers** et Colt des bataillons d'infanterie vont maintenant être réunies dans des compagnies de mitrailleuses de brigade.

Les bataillons qui ont dû laisser aller leur deux mitrailleuses lourdes ont maintenant reçu en échange 8 fusils mitrailleurs Lewis beaucoup plus légers, qui peuvent être portés et utilisés sur l'avance, un instrument beaucoup plus adapté à leurs besoins.

Peu d'officiers ont anticipé les changements très importants que ceci amènera aux tactiques de l'infanterie. Les pelotons auront bientôt leur section Lewis, leur permettant d'adopter le feu et mouvement sur l'attaque. Et les armes lourdes à bandes de balles vont être concentrées dans les compagnies de mitrailleurs experts pour fournir un tir indirect massif, afin d'appuyer les formations en attaque comme une sorte d'artillerie légère.

Le Corps des mitrailleurs canadiens développera une expertise impressionnante dans l'utilisation du tir concentré à longue distance. Les seize armes d'une compagnie de mitrailleurs peuvent ainsi concentrer leur tir sur des zones battues jusqu'à 5000 verges, soit 4.5 kilomètres.

LCol Ian McCulloch, « 'A War of Machines' », Canadian Army Journal, 11.2, Summer 2008, pp. 82-92.



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31 March 1916

Les infrastructures nécessaires pour la campagne de la Somme



Les chevaux tirant des ambulances en 1916

La route unique pour le transport lourd dans la région de la Somme, secteur britannique, est celle de CONTAY-HAUDEVILLE-ENGLEBELMER-MARTINSART-AVELUY.

Ceci est nettement insuffisant pour les besoins de la campagne majeure en préparation pour fin-juin entre Albert et Beaumont-Hamel, dans la région de La Somme.

Il faut donc créer des routes solides qui incluent des matériaux amenés des Îles britanniques.

Le réseau de chemin de fer nécessite aussi l'ajout rapide de 90km de rail, avec 17 stations dont les principales sont à Doullens et Vecquemont, avec la capacité d'un circuit de 15 trains d'approvisionnement par jour.

Il faut aussi canaliser l'eau pour 400,000 hommes et 100,000 chevaux.

Un centre médical doit aussi être établi à Corbie, avec son hôpital permanent néo-zélandais, et des dispensaires à Neuville, afin de pouvoir effectuer des évacuations rapides vers Amiens, où se trouve le 7^e Hôpital général britannique, établi à cet endroit depuis août 1914.

Gilbert, Somme, p. 22-3.



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