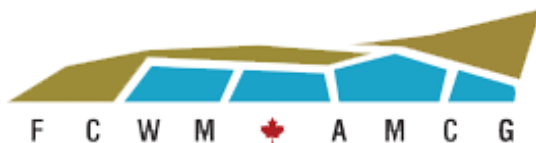


World War I  
**Day-by-Day**  
1914 – 1918

# February 1917

# Février 1917

La première guerre mondiale  
**De jour en jour**  
1914 – 1918



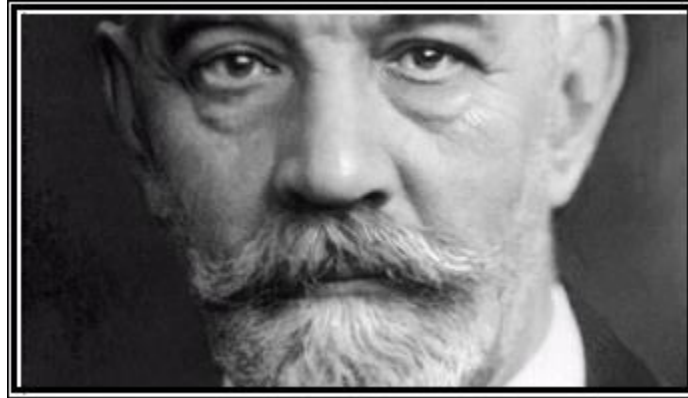
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# 1 February 1917

## A Leap in the Dark

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The Chancellor of Germany, **Theobald Bethmann Holweg**, has lost the influence that allows him to sway the High Command away from fatal decisions.

He has known all along that Unrestricted Submarine Warfare was bound to bring the United States in the War and cause a demise.

«A Bismark, with a William I to appeal to, might have charged the Field-Marshal with insubordination. Bethmann lacked the self-assurance of his predecessor, and he could not help feeling that a policy that was backed by all of the military leaders, the Emperor, the Reichstag majority, and most politically active Germans might, after all, be sounder than he had believed. It may be that his tendency to fatalism helped persuade him to give way. Riezler wrote on the day after the fateful decision that it was

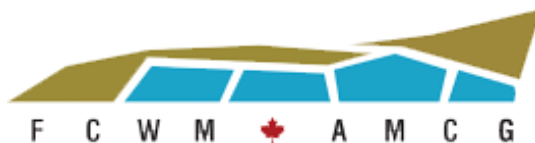
«‘a leap in the dark. We all have the feeling that this question hangs over us like a doom. If history follows the laws of tragedy, then Germany should be destroyed by this fatal mistake, which embodies all its earlier tragic mistakes.’»

«The Chancellor may have had something of this feeling, and this may have been why, when the decision was made, he did not resign, as Valentini urged him to do, but remained in office to bear his share of the responsibility for what ensued.»

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Craig, Germany, 381; quote from Kurt Riezler' Diaries and Essays (1972).

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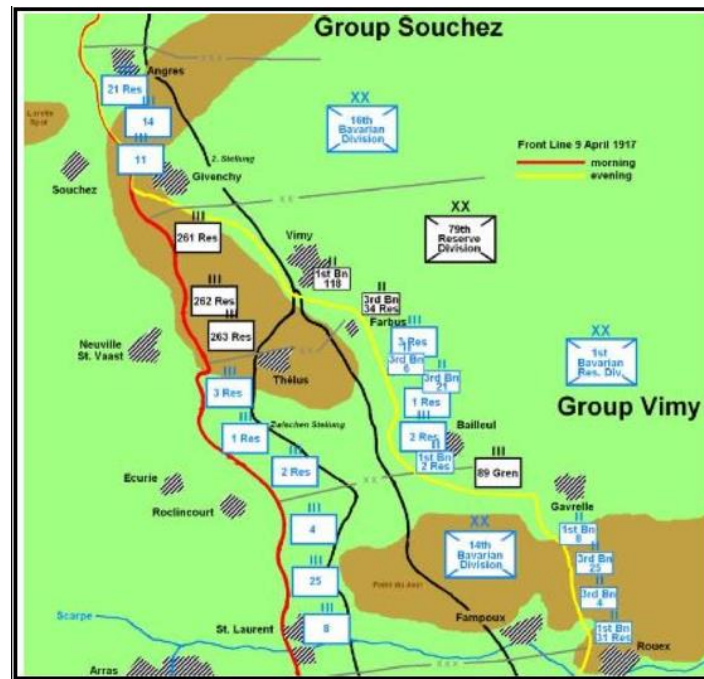
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## 2 février 1917

### Ordres d'Opération canadiens



Le **2 février 1917**, le général Byng donne ses ordres opérationnels à ses commandants de divisions au château de Camblain l'Abbé, tout juste au delà de portée des canons allemands.

Les dispositions ennemies sont relativement bien connues dans le secteur de la crête de Vimy puisqu'il a été occupé par les Français et les Anglais depuis le début de la guerre.

Byng aligne les divisions par séniorité, au pied de la crête, du sud au nord, entre Neuville St.Vast et Souchez, un front de quatre mille (6.4km).

Leur tâche est pour l'instant de se familiariser avec le terrain, améliorer les tranchées, et élaborer des ébauches de plans de division en coordination avec le QG du Corps et les armes d'appui.

Pierre Berton, Vimy, p. 112.

<http://www.canadiansoldiers.com/history/battlehonours/westernfront/vimymap1.jpg>



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## 3 February 1917

### President Wilson breaks relations with Germany

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After six weeks of diplomatic tendering to the belligerents' whims, **President Woodrow Wilson of the United States** is appalled.

Germany has just announced, with two days' warning, that it resumed Unrestricted Submarine Warfare (USW), meaning that all American ships found in the vicinity of the British isles or on the French coast would be sunk at sight, without warning.

Wilson gave three days to German Ambassador Bernstorff to retrieve his passport and leave. He considered the affront such as to warrant breaking diplomatic relations.

What rankles Wilson is also the fact that Germany has refused to state its war aims, as requested, letting it to be understood the her exigencies would be proportional to the final extent of her victory.



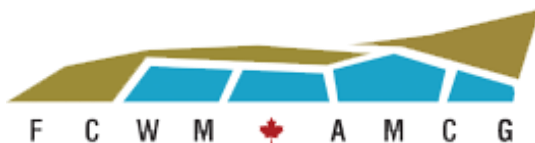
**On 3 February 1917**, Wilson goes to the Capitol to address both Houses of Congress. He feels compelled to sound a warning note, in a final forlorn hope of deterring Germany from driving him from his neutral position. If American ships and lives were in fact sacrificed by German submarines, he said:

**– I shall take the liberty of coming again before Congress to ask that authority be given me to use any means that may be necessary for the protection of our seamen and our people in the prosecution of their peaceful and legitimate errands on the high seas»**

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Lloyd George, Memoirs, III, p. 1661.

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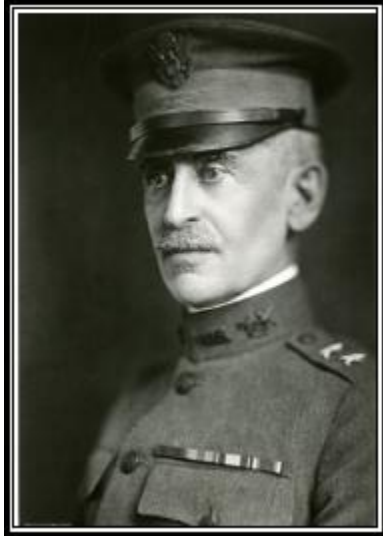
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## 4 February 1917

### United States Conscription Bill (Crowder Bill)

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After having addressed Congress to state the severity of the situation following the reinstatement of Unrestricted Submarine Warfare by Germany, President Woodrow Wilson did not lose any time in drafting a Bill calling for selective compulsory service.

**«At 4 p.m. on February 4, 1917, the day after breaking diplomatic relations with Germany, President Wilson called on Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, unattended and without previous appointment.**

**Half an hour later Baker sent for the Judge Advocate General, Enoch Crowder, and asked him to have a conscription bill by 10 o'clock the following morning.**

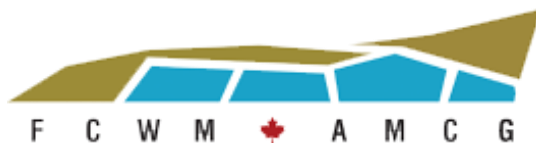
**Crowder's Selective Service Act of 1917 – which passed without any really restrictive amendments after a vigorous Congressional fight – remains the foundation of American conscription legislation.»<sup>1</sup>**

This Bill calls for all fit men between 21 and 30 years old to register and submit to a blind selection process.

The United States Army, if it is to be called into the war, will not be a volunteer army.

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore Ropp, War in the Modern World (Duke U. Press, 1959; NY: Collier, 1962, 7th Printing 1973), p. 259  
<http://shsmo.org/historicmissourians/name/c/crowder/>



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## 5 February 1917

### A steady pair of hands at the Air Board

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The British Air Board has had a recent change of Director when Lord Cowdray was appointed in December.

But the past reputation of the Board convinced the Government that a new Charter should accompany the new Director so that the reckless competition between the Army Air Service (Royal Flying Corps) and the Royal Naval Air Service be appeased.

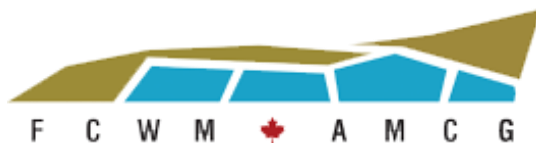
One of the incentives for this action is that reports from France are now acknowledging that the Germans are progressing in the aviation technology, and that the advantage in aerial observation may not be possible in the Spring.

The two services are now quite clear that the development of aviation technology will have to be orchestrated so as to become as efficient as possible, without regard for the advantage of one service over the other.

**« This was the situation in which months of futile wrangling and competitive organisation had landed the air force. The military and naval authorities respectively had had things in their own hands, with this result. Once again we had to call in civilian aid to clear up the muddle.»**

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Lloyd George, Memoirs, Chap 57 - «Creating the Air Ministry», Vol. IV: p. 1858-80.



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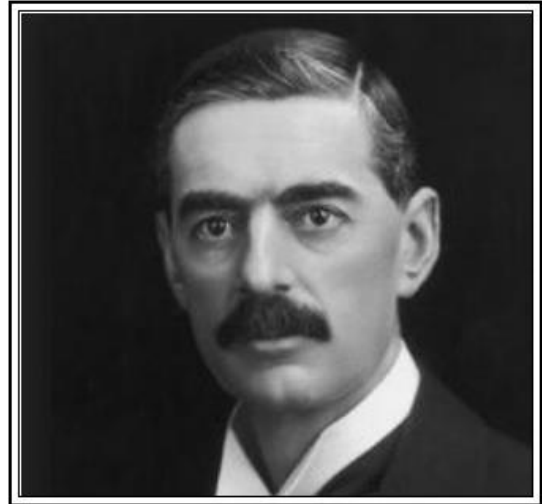
## 6 February 1917

### Neville Chamberlain appointed Director of National Service

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Since November 1916, the British Government has given its consent in principle that Conscription be advanced another notch.

In early 1916, the Government had enacted the Military Service Act, which imposed military service on all men according to their class of age and marital status. But many men were retained in their jobs, and some were even returned from the army after it was realised that the industry was suffering from too many men being drafted and too few qualified workmen retained.



But the strict overall management of manpower in civilian job market was not imposed, except in armament industries and agriculture.

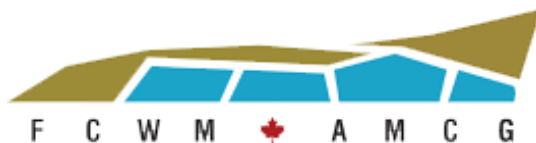
The Lloyd George Coalition Government now wants to introduce National Service by which all men, and perhaps some women, will be directed toward jobs that they are qualified to fill which are higher in priority for the war effort. This will constitute a total control on labour for the better war effort.

The man announced as Director, on **6 February 1917**, is the son of the famous Conservative minister, Joseph Chamberlain, a recent successful mayor of Birmingham, the city made rich by his father.

**Neville Chamberlain**, as Director, and soon-to-be Minister (if Parliament will have the scheme), will be given the enormous task of orchestrating a system by which all men of working age in Great Britain will be registered and assigned to a military or civilian job. – That's a challenge for an up-and-coming scion.

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Lloyd George, Memoirs, Chapter 45 - «A System of National Service», Vol. III: p. 1350-77.



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## 7 février 1917

### Le général Haig se confie au général Maurice

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**Le major-général Frederick B. Maurice** est le Directeur des Opérations militaires [D.M.O. ] au War Office. Il travaille à élaborer les plans futurs pour l'Armée britannique et préparer des exposés pour le Général Robertson, le Chef de l'État-major impérial, qui doit en informer le Cabinet.

Le général Maurice est donc en liaison et consultations constantes avec l'état-major Opérations du Corps expéditionnaire britannique en France.

Le **7 février 1917**, Maurice reçoit une lettre personnelle du Commandant-en-chef, le général Haig, pour le mettre au fait de ses appréhensions en ce qui a trait aux opérations que le général français Nivelle prépare pour lui.

Haig entrevoit que le rôle qui est réservé à l'Armée britannique dans la campagne du printemps 1917 en est un qui réserve le plus gros des risques aux Anglais.

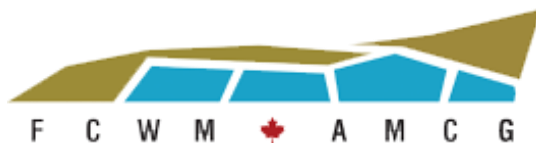
Nivelle prévoit qu'une première phase dans le secteur d'Arras servira à forcer les forces allemandes à concentrer leur défense au nord, ce qui sera suivi par une poussée française au sud, en Champagne.

Haig entrevoit que l'armée britannique va servir d'appât pour un jeu facile. Il ne ménage donc rien pour convaincre le gouvernement de le laisser décider lui-même des stratégies opportunes pour son commandement, et de le soustraire à l'autorité de Nivelle.

– Le major-général Maurice pourrait-il, donc, éloigner les politiciens des plans d'état-major français?

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Barton and Banning, Vimy and Arras, p. 43.



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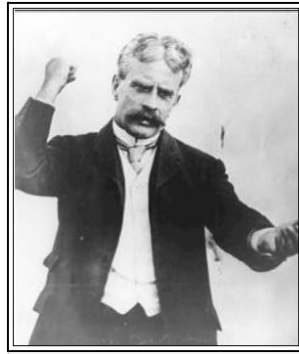
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## 8 February 1917

### An invitation to go raise hell in London

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Only nine days after having become Prime Minister of Great Britain, David Lloyd George announced that he was inviting the first ministers of the Dominions to participate in an Imperial Conference in London, in early March.

Although this had not been done before, Lloyd George knew that these first ministers would be particularly impressed if they were also invited to take part in sessions of an «Imperial War Cabinet» in which the secrets of the war would be revealed in camera and policy discussed in light of wider recommendations.

This does not fall on deaf ears with **Prime Minister Robert Borden of Canada**. Borden is very frustrated that Canada is providing so many soldiers but is not involved in Imperial policy-making.

He is now determined on preparing indeed very well for this Conference.

One item of particular frenzy, for him at this time, is a Resolution that he intends to present in London about the status of Dominions in the Empire, and the consultations that will have to take place if they are to play a further role in the War. This is the kernel of his view for a new «Empire Commonwealth».

— From the sound of it, Lloyd George is likely to be getting quite a bit more than he bargained for...

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J.L. Granatstein, Irving M. Abella, David J. Bercuson, R. Craig Brown, H. Blair Neatby, Twentieth Century Canada (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1983), Chap 4 – «1911-1919: The Road to and from Vimy Ridge» p. 87-128.



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## 9 February 1917

### Halt to exportation of wood to British Isles

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The recent resumption of Unrestricted Submarine Warfare by the German Navy is sending shivers through the shipping industries.

The British Government has to plan for considerable reduction of tonnage available for importation from America.

One of the very voluminous item of shipping which is being sent from Canada is wood.

The forests of Great Britain have so far been protected and the manpower there is no longer available, because of the war drain on labour.

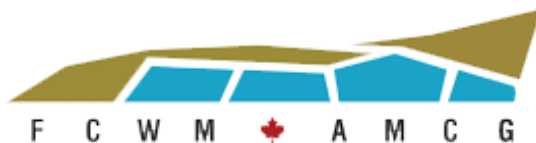
Some battalions of the Canadian Forestry Corps have been sent to England and France to address the problem, but with the complete ban on the use of shipping for transport of wood overseas, the numbers of Canadian Forestry Corps units will have to be increased drastically.

For those who do not relish the idea of joining the combat troops, and those who are already in the CEF but would gladly leave it, it becomes an option. – But you have to have experience...

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Roland H. Hill, «The Canadian Forestry Corps», in *Canada in the Great World War – An Authentic Account of the Military History of Canada from the Earliest Days to the Close of the War of the Nations*, by Various authorities. (Toronto: United Publishers of Canada Limited, 1921), Vol. 5, App. B.

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## 10 February 1917

### Signore Leonida Bissolati wants guns

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In the Conference of Rome, in early January 1917, the Prime Minister of Great Britain meant to encourage by all possible means the Italian Government to undertake a major offensive against the Austrians that would take the focus away from France.

For this purpose he offered General Cadorna allied material support for the Italian Army. Cadorna, however, soon learned of the opposition of both the British and French High Command to Lloyd George's strategic views, and refused to accept something that would have been pulled out of the hide of his fellow military officers.

The information that Lloyd George had in fact offered substantial artillery to the Italians could not be kept a secret in the Italian political sphere. **Signore Leonida Bissolati**, a member of Parliament, made quite a scene in public when it was revealed that General Cadorna had in fact refused a bona fide offer of guns, ammunitions and well-trained troops, so sorely lacking below the Alps.

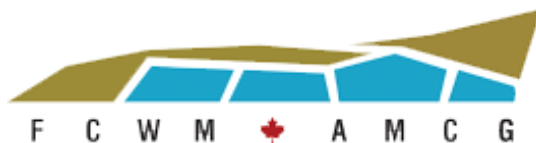
Bissolati went so far as to go to London, in **February 1917**, to try to recoup the fumble that was now being attributed to General Cadorna.

With the recent decision by the British government to support Nivelle in the spring, the offer of guns is no longer on the table. But LG cannot let the occasion slip, and still promises guns despite the War Office reluctance. — These will be sent in April, not quite in the same numbers as originally offered.



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Lloyd George. Memoirs, IV: 2275-80.



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# 11 Février 1917

## Une idée dont plusieurs réclament la paternité

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Devant l'effroyable anticipation des pertes qui vont être encourues sous peu par la campagne sous-marine sans restrictions des Allemands, les services navals sont à court d'idées.

Effectivement, tout a été essayé, mais on ne se souvient pas des succès obtenus dans les guerres précédentes.



Le **11 février 1917**, lors d'un rare dimanche qu'il passe dans sa famille, Maurice Hankey, le brillant Secrétaire du Comité de Guerre britannique, se soucie profondément des conséquences terribles que va causer l'interruption du transport maritime pour les Iles britanniques.

Il est à même de savoir, peut-être aussi bien que quiconque, ce que représente le commerce de haute mer pour la vie économique du Royaume-Uni.

Toutefois Hankey se remémore tout à coup que le système des convois maritimes a été utilisé dans les siècles passés, et que des calculs de probabilité ont démontré que des cargos réunis sous la protection de quelques navires de guerre avaient des chances beaucoup plus grandes de réussir une traversée qu'en la faisant en solitaire.

Hankey présente sa suggestion le lendemain, dont il réclamera la paternité avec grande fierté.

— Il ne sera pas le seul à le faire...

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Hankey, Supreme Command, II: 645-6;

Roskil, Hankey, Vol. 1: 356-8; Lloyd George, Memoirs, III:1120ff.



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12 February 1917

General Maude's slithering crawl to Baghdad



The humiliating defeat of the Indian army at Kut al Imara, in April 1916, was followed by the capture of the 13,000 troops under General Townshend, in Kut, and the withdrawal of the relieving 6th Indian Army, under General Fenton Aylmer.

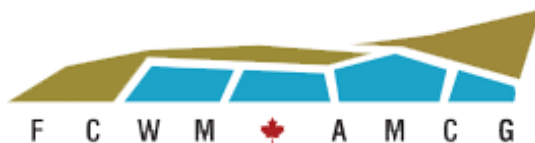
But the defeat was not accepted by the British High Command and a new effort was made at the end of 1916 under General Frederick Stanley Maude with better troops and better British support.

Since December 1916, Maude has succeeded at going back up the insalubrious waterway by an «**imperceptible offensive,**» of well-

thought-out trench nibbles, methodical and deliberate, on the West bank of the Tigris.»

By 12 February 1917, Maude's slithering crawl is pushing deep into Ottoman territory at a time when German support has been withdrawn.

Liddell Hart, First World War «The Capture of Baghdad. »



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# 13 February 1917

## Canadians involved in Trench Raids

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By 1917 the Canadians have established a major raiding program in the Vimy sector designed to disturb the enemy and injure his morale while learning as much as possible about the ground they must eventually take and how it is defended.

The raids also provide an excellent opportunity to practice infantry/artillery co-operation.

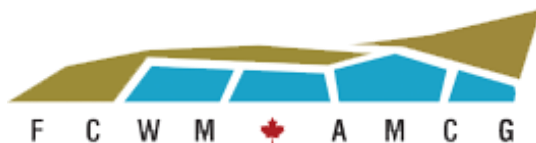
**On the night of 12/13 February 1917,** approximately nine hundred men of the 10th Infantry Brigade inflict an estimated 160 casualties (including the capture of more than 50 prisoners) and destroy dug-outs, mine shafts and barbed wire.

Their own losses total approximately 150. According to the raid report, the prisoners include 'one officer and three NCOs'.

In the enemy trenches, clubs, bayonets and bombs or grenades are the most used weapons, and one strongpoint 'was dealt with by bombers using phosphorus Bombs.'

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Brereton Greenhous and Stephen J. Harris, Canada and the Battle of Vimy Ridge, 9-12 April 1917, (2007), p. 75.



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# 14 February 1917

## Marshal Haig visits Vimy Ridge

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**On 14 February 1917**, Marshal Douglas Haig, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, pays a visit to the Canadian Corps.

It is the first time that Haig sees the full Canadian Corps with its four divisions.

He remembers the Canadians from the Battle of the Somme, where they were involved from September to November.

Haig is informed of the arrangements being made by Lieutenant-General Julian Byng for the preparation of the assault of Vimy Ridge.

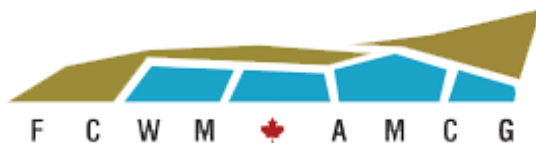
Byng is a man that Haig has known for a long time in the high society around royal Court and in the field. It is Haig who appointed his friend «Bongo» to command the Canadians, even if he protested that he did not know a single Canadian. It is obvious that the choice was right. «Bongo» is indeed the easy-going natural leader that the independent-minded and easily-offended Canadians needed.

But Haig, a quiet man, is also casting an eye on the Canadian soldiers. They are obviously in very high spirit, of a strong build, and active. They are good self-confident troops to have in his army group.

Giving them their own special piece of turf to go get for themselves is just to their liking.

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Williams, Byng, Chap 9 - Vimy, p. 142-70.



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# 15 February 1917

## The fateful promise to tell it all

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Under great pressure, the British Government made the promise, in 1916, that it would submit to a Parliament Commission of Enquiry and reveal all aspects of the management of the faulty Campaign of the Dardanelles, in 1915.

Since then, that Commission, led by **Lord Cromer**, has interviewed many participants and witnesses, and was capable of putting together a draft document that explains how, at that moment, errors were made and fateful decisions were taken.

With Kitchener dead since July 1916, the principal minister involved in the Gallipoli part of the campaign cannot speak for himself. But his reputation is such, in most parts of the Parliament, that any blame on him is perceived as treason on The Hero. Unfortunately, he does not come out resplendent in Lord Cromer's books.

The Minister for the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, for his part, has already paid the political price for the fiasco and defended himself with ferocious depositions, full of evidences and telling memoranda that did not spare his best friends.



The Earl of Cromer by John Singer Sargent

On **15 February 1917**, the Government has now received the draft of the Commission's report for comments. — The fateful promise to tell it all last year is now biting back with a vengeance.

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Hankey, Supreme Command, II: 525-6.



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## 16 February 1917

### General Nivelle has an interest in the French from Canada

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On 16 February 1917, General Nivelle has a meeting with Field Marshal Haig from which it is said that they came to an agreement on the British cooperation to the Spring campaign.

Haig invited Nivelle to visit the Canadian Corps, preparing for the taking of Vimy Ridge. Haig was in fact adamant, against Nivelle's view, that the ridge had to be taken to protect the left flank of the Third Army. He had his way.

On the same day as this visit, Nivelle was receiving a report from a certain Colonel de la Panouse, reporting on the state of recruitment of the Canadian Corps, and the difficulties encountered in convincing French Canadians to enlist.

La Panouse knew enough on the question to be able to call Henri Bourassa's anti-conscription campaign «French-Canadian Sinn-Feinism», and to recommend that perhaps France might make an effort to use French military personnel and French Catholic clergy to support a drive for more French solidarity.

No report can be found of the conversation between Haig, Byng, Nivelle, and perhaps Thomas-Louis Tremblay, the Commanding Officer of the 22nd French-Canadian Battalion, during this visit. It is easy to imagine that the subject might very well have been broached.

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Hunter, Foch, 127.

Pépin, Carl, « Du Military Service Act aux émeutes de Québec: l'effort de guerre canadien-français vu de France (1914-1918) », Bulletin d'Histoire politique, 17:2 (hiver 2009), pp. 89-110.



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# 17 Février 1917

## Préparations des mitrailleuses pour Vimy

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Les Canadiens ont maintenant créé une école spéciale pour les mitrailleurs à Pernes-en-Artois, qui complémente celles des Anglais à Grantham, en Angleterre, et à Camiers, en France.

Le Colonel canadien Raymond Brutinel et le capitaine Muerlings y développent un entraînement qui est particulier pour les Canadiens.

Les Canadiens sont très actifs dans les raids dans le No Man's Land, et insistent pour contrôler cet espace qui les sépare de l'ennemi. Ils ont donc développé des techniques pour accompagner ces raids d'un appui de feu automatique.

Ils ont aussi établi des méthodes de harcèlement en profondeur qui réduisent les mouvements de surface à l'arrière des premières lignes allemandes.

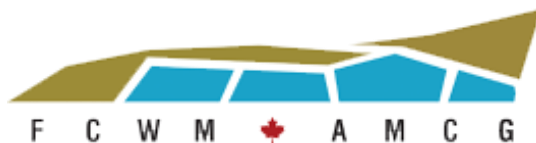
Le tir de harcèlement a subi une baisse au cours du mois de février à cause du manque de canons de rechange pour les mitrailleuses. Les Allemands ont donc repris leurs activités à 800 ou mille verges. Mais les prisonniers témoignent que le feu indirect des mitrailleuses cause des ennuis importants.

Les mitrailleuses employées dans un rôle indirect sont de mieux en mieux maîtrisées par les Canadiens. Brutinel et ses officiers jouent un rôle important dans ces améliorations tactiques.

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Grafton, Emma Gees, 63.

<https://archives.museeheritage.ca/seated-portrait-of-brutinel-in-military-uniform>



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# 18 Février 1917

## La menace du Halbertstadt

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Le 18 février 1917, le commandant d'escadrille du 16e escadron du *Royal Flying Corps*, le capitaine Routh, reçoit un briefing d'escadre sur le rôle qui devra être joué par les forces aériennes pour la bataille de Vimy.

L'observation y est cruciale puisque beaucoup d'artillerie lourde et super-lourde a été amenée pour la bataille avec des munitions en grande quantité.

Il est d'importance cruciale que l'artillerie puisse être dirigée des airs pour assister les forces attaquantes sur l'avance.

Le capitaine Routh apprend toutefois que les Allemands sont maintenant dotés d'un intercepteur de haute performance, le *Halberstadt*, qui possède l'avantage énorme de tirer deux mitrailleuses synchronisées à travers l'hélice.

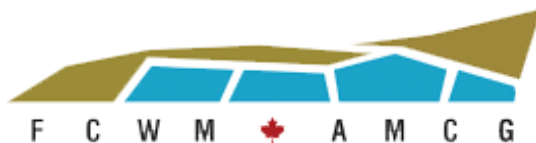
Ceci n'a pas encore été perfectionné par les Alliés. Les appareils B.E. devront donc être escortés par des 'pusher' de type F.E.2b et F.E.2d, qui sont poussés par leur hélice, ce qui permet un champ d'action pour la mitrailleuse en avant. Mais les F.E. sont lents.

Tout ceci n'est pas sans risques énormes. Les *Halberstadt* sont connus comme des Albatros améliorés. Leur supériorité sur les avions anglais et français est maintenant devenue incontestable.



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McKee, *Vimy Ridge*, 60-1.



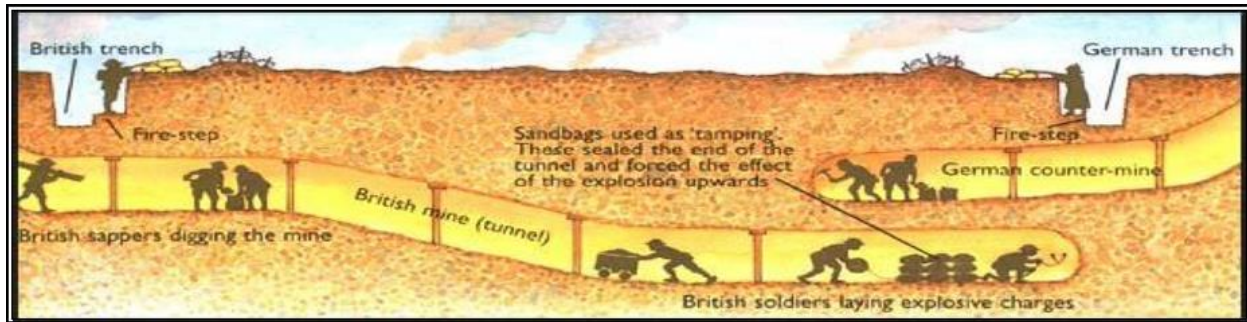
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19 February 1917

## The Underground War



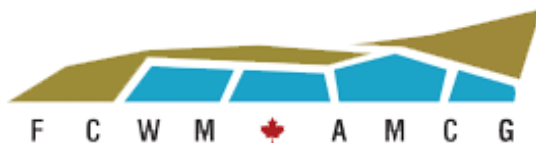
**On 19 February 1917** the 78th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force carried out a raid. One of the purposes was to thwart the enemy's attempts to gain the upper hand in the underground war of tunnel and mine.

The raiders carried out mobile charges - haversacks filled with explosive with an external fuse to set them off.

One party engaged in demolishing dugouts and mine shafts, singlehandedly destroying a German tunnel system and demolishing the power and usefulness of explosives for sabotage.

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Bill Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare*, p. 104.



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## 20 février 1917

### Un besoin de troupes pour les chemins de fer

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Le besoin de transport se fait tellement sentir pour les préparations de la bataille d'Arras (qui inclue la portion canadienne à Vimy) que les ressources en transport ferroviaire ne suffisent plus.

Le grand architecte du réseau ferroviaire du Corps expéditionnaire britannique en France, **Sir Eric Geddes**, fait tout pour augmenter le nombre de milles de voies ferrées au service des troupes anglaises, ainsi que le nombre et la qualité des engins et matériels roulants disponibles. Ce qui lui manque maintenant est des hommes.

Il s'adresse au maréchal Haig, qui lui-même se retourne vers le War Office pour que les Dominions soient incités à faire parvenir des troupes de chemins de fer.

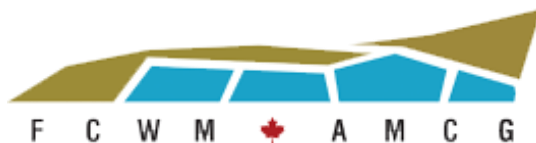
On croit ainsi pouvoir aller chercher des volontaires qui ne s'avanceraient pas vers les services armés, mais qui pourraient consentir à servir au sein du service ferroviaire britannique. Cette incitation va conduire vers une augmentation des unités canadiennes de 5 à 12 pour avril 1917.

Le système de transport va pouvoir fournir pour la bataille d'Arras trois fois le volume de matériel transporté pour la bataille de la Somme, pourtant beaucoup plus longue.

Le capitalisme s'est mis à la tâche. —La guerre est maintenant devenue totalement industrielle

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Major George Jager, «Des routes d'acier: la contribution des troupes ferroviaires canadiennes sur le front ouest, 1914-1918», Le Journal de l'Armée du Canada, Vol. 10:3 (automne 2007), pp. 71-87.



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## 21 February 1917

### An Austrian Closure

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In December 1916 the new Emperor Carl of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire had secretly sent his brother-in-law with an overture for peace talks with France.

But in January 1917 the offer of mediation which was made by President Wilson, and the refusals that it met by both the Entente and the Alliance, have changed the tone of the diplomatic scene.

Now, following the renewal of unlimited submarine warfare, the German Ambassador in Washington has been given his passport to return home.

The Austrian Ambassador, however, is still in residence in the United States, and feels a tremendous pressure there to repudiate the German policy and pursue separate negotiations.

But Austria has triggered suspicion in Berlin and the Emperor in Vienna is watched carefully by the Germans. This is why the **Austrian Foreign Minister, Count Ottokar Czernin**, presents a statement of Austrian-Hungarian policy, on **21 February 1917**, which states clearly that there is no thought, in Vienna, of disconnecting in any way from the Alliance with Germany or Turkey, and that principles of Austrian-Hungarian policy endorse Germany's war aims.

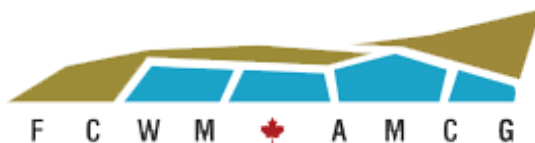
This brings closure to the unacknowledged overture that Carl had dared to attempt.

— It also seals the fate of the Habsburg dynasty.

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Lloyd George, Memoirs, Chap 61, «The Austrian Peace Move», IV: 1983-2035.

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## 22 February 1917

### The barbed wire problem and the 106 Fuse

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The main problem for the attacker in trench warfare is barbed wire.

There is so much barbed wire in France from the north to the south that it competes with railroad and ship building for the available iron.

Much has been tried: cut through with wirecutters, tear it with tanks, destroy it with artillery, but it remains a defensive obstacle of first importance. Men on the attack

dread the barbed wire as a death trap.

In 1905, in the Russian-Japanese war, the Bangalore torpedo was invented, which consists of a series of tubes filled with ammonium which can be assembled into a long pole that can be pushed into the wire and detonated, creating a path through a field of wire. But it is heavy, noisy and unwieldy in night patrols.



In 1916, however, there is now a new fuse that can be set on a high explosive shell that ensures that the shell does not sink in the ground before exploding, and distributes the energy at ground level so as to push out and cut wire to allow men to pass through.

The «**Fuse, Percussion with cap N° 106**» is now available in great numbers in the Canadian Corps, and good use is being made of it in Vimy. Batteries of 4-5-inch howitzers are being dedicated to this task with great success.

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Rawling, Surviving Trench Warfare, p. 109-100.



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## 23 February 1917

### A Women's March in the streets of Petrograd

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The war has collapsed the Russian economy. While struggling to cope with supplying the troops; the Tsarist government is out of touch with the hungry and war-weary urban population. Smaller scale strikes periodically break out despite police repression. The atmosphere is tense and charged with anger.

**On February 23, 1917**, an estimated 90,000 housewives and female factory workers staged a march in the Russian capital Petrograd, which ignited a chain of events that led to downfall of Imperial Russia.

Hungry and tired of struggling to feed their families while their fathers and husbands are fighting, the women march through the streets shouting “Bread” and “Stop War”.

By the 25th of February the entire city is shut down. Factory workers, students, members of the middle class not only demand the end of war but bear signs demanding the end of Tsarist Regime.



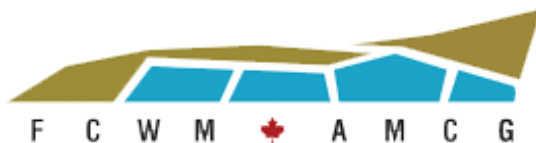
The message is simple: this is not about ideology: — It's the bread, Stupid!

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S.A. Smith, *The Russian Revolution: A Very Short Introduction*.

Image's source: <http://cpcml.ca/Tmld2010/D40048a.htm>

The translation of the poster reads: "Increase rations for soldiers' families, protectors of freedom and national peace."



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# 24 February 1917

## The Great Hindenburg Retreat

On **24 February 1917**, the Germans start their great withdrawal to a new defensive position some 10 to 40 miles (16 to 64 km) to the east.

The new line is known to them as the Siegfried Line. It will take four weeks to complete the move.

The Hindenburg Line has been in preparation for months by a labour force that includes thousands of French workers on forced labour.

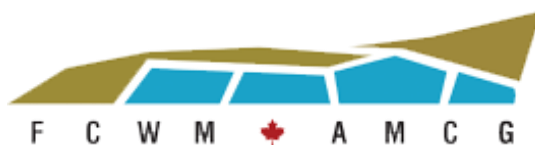
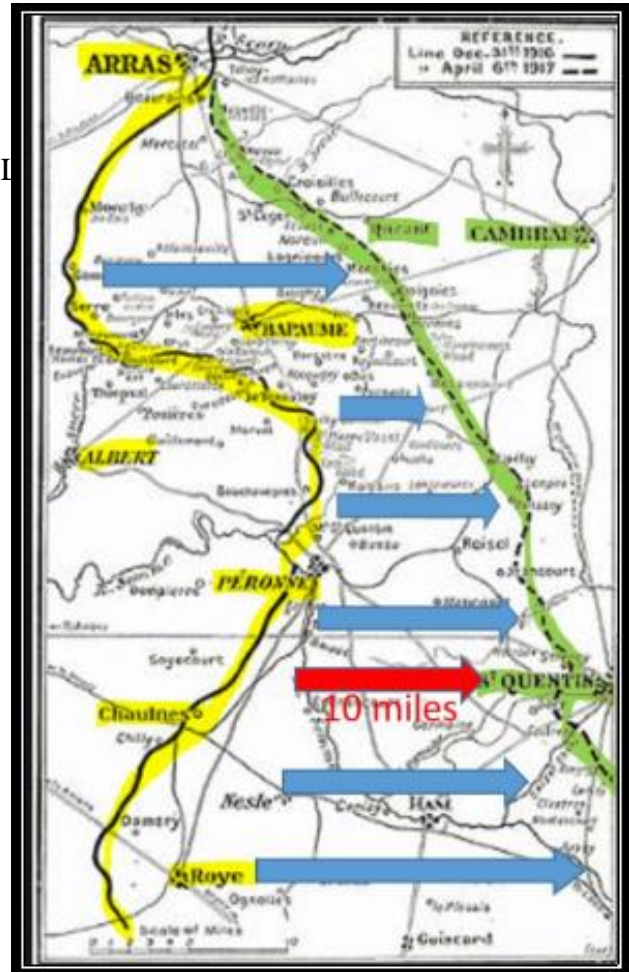
The reason for the withdrawal is that the Germans want to diminish the numbers of soldiers involved in manning the straighter line of defence, and increase the numbers of mobile reserves that can be brought to bear at the right place when needed.

The withdrawal will involve a scorch earth policy, by which everything will be destroyed on their way, buildings, roads, bridges and culverts, railroads, even fields of agriculture, water wells and fruit-bearing trees.

Booby traps will also be set everywhere to slow down the pursuit.

This comes as a pure surprise to General Nivelle, whose map of Spring Operations is now changed substantially.

— The big question is now: Is this good or bad?



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## 25 February 1917

### Those animals out there...

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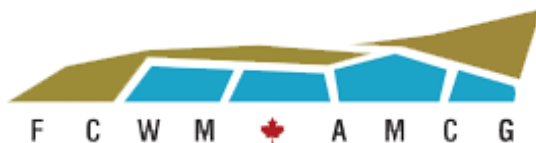
Siegfried Sassoon, perhaps the best known poet of the First World War, wrote in his *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* the following on cap badges:



*« Every afternoon at half-past five the School assembled to listen to a lecture. Eyeing an audience of about 300 officers and N. C. O. 's, I improved my knowledge of regimental badges, which seemed somehow to affect the personality of the wearer. A lion, a lamb, a dragon or an antelope, a crown, a harp, a tiger or a sphynx, these devices differentiated men in more ways than one. »*

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Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (New York: Coard, McCann, Inc., 1939), p. 14.



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## 26 February 1917

### Sir Henry Horne, Gunners' Gunner

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At the end of February 1917, the Canadian Corps is under First British Army, north of Arras. I British Corps is to the left (north) of the Canadian Corps.

The Commander of the First British Army is **Sir Henry Horne**, one of the most accomplished artillerymen of the British Expeditionary Force. He was XV Corps commander during the Battle of the Somme and made particularly good use of his artillery.

In fact Horne can claim credit, with his principal Corps gunner, Major General E.W. Alexander, for having developed the 'Creeping Barrage', which had seen its first attempts at the battle of Loos, in 1915.



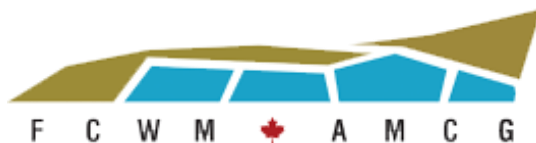
The Creeping Barrage was steadily improved from July 1916, and became an accepted artillery method on 15 September 1916, on the day that the Canadians were involved in Courcelette.

Now Army Commander Horne is determined that the Battle of Vimy Ridge will have the best artillery support that can be provided. In addition to the heavy Army artillery resources, he assigns the artillery from I Corps to be in support of the Canadian Corps for the operation, which multiplies the artillery resources that the senior Canadian gunner, Brigadier General H.E. Burstall, can count on for the attack.

— Of course, Creeping Barrages will be used and are being planned meticulously.

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Simon Robbins, «Henry Horne», in Beckett & Corvi, Haig's Generals, (2006), p. 96-121.



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## 27 February 1917

### The Gunners' coach at Canadian Corps

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At the end of February 1917, a 33-year-old professional British officer arrived at the Headquarters of the Canadian Corps to become the Chief of Staff to the Commander, Royal Artillery, a newspaper owner.

That officer, with a renown as a super brain in the artillery world, was **Major Alan Brooke**, a protégé of Sir Henry Horne, Commander of First Army.

Brooke was singled out in the development of the Creeping Barrage, in 18 Division during the Battle of the Somme, and is now assigned to the Canadian Corps to get a grip on the inexperienced Canadian gunners.

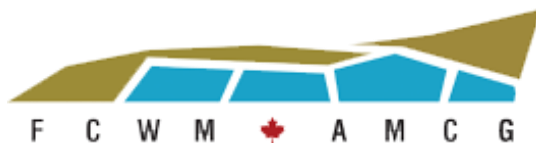
Brooke becomes to all practical purposes the *eminence grise* for the Battle of Vimy's grandiose artillery plan. Indefatigable and superbly meticulous, Brooke was both a man of broad ideas and detail and a good coach. His sterling work at Vimy will set him on his way to become **Field Marshal Sir Allanbrooke**, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff under Prime Minister Winston Churchill in the Second World War.

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David Fraser, ALANBROOKE, (1982), Chap 7.

Photo of CRA, MGen E.W.B. Morrison, flanked by Brooke and McNaughton.

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## 28 February 1917

### Massive Canadian Trench Raid Fails

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On the night of **28 February - 1 March 1917**, the 4th Canadian Division launches a massive raid with the 54th and 75th Battalions, with the help of poison gas.

The plan was to release the gas from cylinders placed in the forward trenches, ninety minutes before dawn, and then the infantry were to cross over to the enemy trenches in a wave, supported by strong patrols.

However, when the gas is released, it drifts parallel to the Canadian lines, inflicting casualties on the 75th Battalion before it moves out.

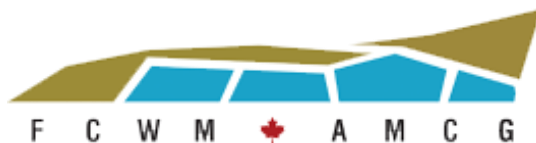
When the men of the 54th and 75th Battalions attacked at 0530 the Germans were themselves ungasped and alert. Both Battalion commanders and many of their troops were killed. Out of 1700 men involved, 687 ended up as casualties. The raid was a failure and demonstrated the danger of using gas.

Subsequent minor operations returned to proven methods and relied on cover fire from artillery, mortars, and machine guns to protect the infantry.

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Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare*, page 105.

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