

World War I
Day-by-Day
1914 – 1918

March 1917

Mars 1917

La première guerre mondiale
De jour en jour
1914 – 1918



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1 March 1917

The Zimmerman Telegram

This telegram intercepted by the British, relayed to United States, revealed to the public on 1 March 1917:

Telegram 19 Jan 1917, Secretary of State Zimmerman to Ambassador Eckhardt, German Minister in Mexico.

ON THE FIRST OF FEBRUARY WE INTEND TO BEGIN SUBMARINE WARFARE UNRESTRICTED. IN SPITE OF THIS IT IS OUR INTENTION TO ENDEAVOUR TO KEEP THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA NEUTRAL. IF THIS ATTEMPT IS NOT SUCCESSFUL, WE PROPOSE AN ALLIANCE ON THE FOLLOWING BASIS WITH MEXICO. THAT WE SHALL MAKE WAR TOGETHER AND TOGETHER MAKE PEACE. WE SHALL GIVE GENERAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND IT IS UNDERSTOOD THAT MEXICO IS TO RECONQUER HER LOST TERRITORY OF NEW MEXICO, TEXAS AND ARIZONA. THE DETAILS ARE LEFT TO YOU FOR SETTLEMENT.

« YOU ARE INSTRUCTED TO INFORM THE PRESIDENT OF MEXICO OF THE ABOVE IN THE GREATEST CONFIDENCE AS SOON AS IT IS CERTAIN THAT THERE WILL BE AN OUTBREAK OF WAR WITH THE UNITED STATES, AND SUGGEST THAT THE PRESIDENT OF MEXICO, ON HIS OWN INITIATIVE, SHOULD COMMUNICATE WITH JAPAN SUGGESTING ADHERENCE AT ONCE TO THIS PLAN; AT THE SAME TIME OFFER TO MEDIATE BETWEEN GERMANY AND JAPAN.

PLEASE CALL TO THE ATTENTION OF THE PRESIDENT OF MEXICO THAT THE EMPLOYMENT OF RUTHLESS SUBMARINE WARFARE NOW PROMISES TO COMPEL ENGLAND TO MAKE PEACE IN A FEW MONTHS. » – ZIMMERMANN

Lloyd George, Mémoires, III, p. 1667-8.



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2 March 1917

End of the Conference of Petrograd



The delegates of the Entente countries have been gathered in Petrograd since the end of January to sort out how they can coordinate cooperation.

The Conference is now over and those from the West are leaving in the still cold winter.

On the 2nd of March 1917, Lord Milner, the British representative, reports in the following manner:

«I think we have done two things:

– **«We have worked out a practical scheme for the supply of war material, based on the principle of using the available tonnage to give the Russians the largest possible quantities of the types of which they stand most in need.**

– **«We have done what lay in our power to ensure this material being turned to the best account.»**

Lloyd George, *Memoirs*, p. 1578-9.



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3 March 1917

The Canadian Defence Force



The rates of recruiting in Canada are very low by the end of the winter 1916. Publicity campaigns of all kinds appear not to reach the remnants of males in the right ages to join the armed services.

One scheme to try to entice them to put a uniform on their backs was the **Canadian Defence Force**.

The Canadian Defence Force was created specifically for the defence of Canada and guaranteed that its members would not be sent overseas. The plan called for 47 infantry battalions to be created across Canada, to be dedicated to the protection of vital points and other tasks, so as to relieve soldiers who volunteered for overseas duties.

Recruiting for this force began in March 1917. Its aim was to build ranks and files to 50,000. It was advertised as the National Guard Project. The pressure was of course for these soldiers to sign up for CEF.

The National Guard Project started weak and stayed weak. No more than 1,858 men joined it and it had to be disbanded in June from lack of interest. Its rate of turnover to CEF was however of 70%.

Granatstein says it was «confused at best, dishonest at worse», as it was meant to constitute a ready-pool of trained soldiers for compulsory service. — The national threat was next to nil.

David Campbell, «'The First 100,000 Came Easily': Recruiting the Canadian Expeditionary Force in the First World War», in *Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire*, *Le recrutement militaire à l'époque contemporaine (XIXe - XXe siècles)*, Bruxelles: Commission Internationale d'Histoire Militaire (CIHM), 2006) No 86, pp. 62-87.

Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada*, p. 51.



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4 March 1917

The Leader of the Conservative is fully on board

The Conference of Calais, last month, gave the final consent by the British Government that the British Army in France would participate in the extraordinarily large assault headed by the French Army.

General Nivelle was reassured by Prime Minister David Lloyd George that General Haig would fill his part of the plan and prepare for the Battle of Arras, to be launched shortly before the great French offensive of the Chemin des Dames, between Soissons and Rheims.



The key members of Lloyd George's Coalition Government is the Canadian-born **Andrew Bonar Law**, the leader of the Conservative Party and Parliamentarian spokesman for the Government. The Conservative Party is notoriously critical of the French, and immensely protective of Haig's power to define his own strategy.

When he was asked, **in early March 1917**, in private, what he thought of Lloyd George's Calais agreement with Nivelle, Bonar Law's answer was reported this way:

«He didn't like them much himself, but he regarded Lloyd George as a dictator and meant to give him his chance, so acquiesced.»

Hankey, Supreme Command, II: 618.



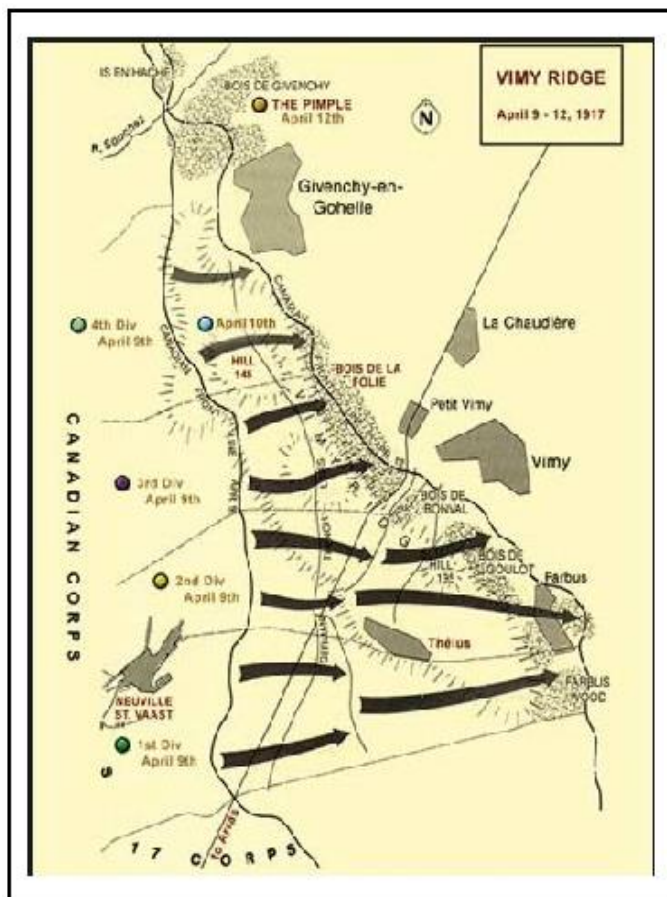
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5 mars 1917

Le plan du Corps canadien est présenté à la Première Armée



Le 5 mars 1917 l'état-major du Premier Corps canadien présente son ébauche de plan pour la conquête de la crête de Vimy à l'état-major de la Première Armée, pour révision et amélioration.

À cette date, on sait généralement que l'assaut doit être donné dans environ un mois.

L'état-major se sert donc de l'expression «**Heure ZÉRO**» pour prévoir les actions qui vont se passer avant et après l'assaut.

Ce moment hautement classifié demeure inconnu de tous ceux qui discutent des plans de sorte que si quelqu'un d'entre eux est fait prisonnier, il ne puisse révéler le moment crucial à l'ennemi.

Cette technique permet aussi des avancements ou retards à l'heure fatidique sans que tous les horaires serrés fussent être recalculés.

Les synchronisations des artilleurs, toutes calculées avant ou après «Zéro», tomberont ainsi en place à la seconde près.



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6 mars 1917

Le Prince Sixtus Bourbon complète sa mission secrète



En décembre 1916, le Prince Sixtus de Bourbon, un membre de la famille Habsburg qui sert au sein de l'armée belge, a été contacté par **l'Empereur Charles d'Autriche-Hongrie** pour effectuer une mission secrète auprès du gouvernement français.

Sixtus a transmis au Président Poincaré une offre pour des négociations secrètes sur les conditions de paix qui seraient acceptables.

Le 6 mars 1917, Sixtus transmet à Charles la réponse française, discutée secrètement avec les gouvernements de l'Entente, que l'offre est inacceptable.

En retour, les conditions françaises proposées sont aussi au delà des concessions possible par l'Autriche.

Elles incluent la restauration et l'indépendance de la Belgique; le ré-établissement des frontières françaises à la ligne de 1814 (incluant Alsace et Lorraine); la restauration et l'indépendance de la Serbie; et de droit de la Russie de saisir Constantinople.

Mais le pire, pour l'Autriche, c'est qu'il n'y est fait aucune mention des arrangements possibles avec l'Italie, contre qui l'Autriche-Hongrie a maintenant versé tellement de sang.

L'Autriche-Hongrie va donc continuer son alliance avec l'Allemagne, mais les Allemands commencent à maugréer que leur allié manque d'énergie:

« Être allié à l'Autriche-Hongrie, c'est comme être enchaîné à un cadavre! »

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



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7 mars 1917

Le Général Robertson n'aime pas le Plan Nivelle



Le général William Robertson est le Chef de l'État-major général impérial britannique. C'est lui qui dirige tout l'état-major de l'Armée britannique, des Dominions et des Colonies, ainsi que de l'Armée Indienne. Il exerce ce pouvoir de Whitehall, à Londres.

Robertson est aussi un de deux hommes militaires qui peuvent être invités à fournir des informations aux ministres du Cabinet de Guerre. L'autre est le Premier Lord de la Marine royale, l'Amiral John Jellicoe.

Le 7 mars 1917, Robertson bouille. Il apprend du Général Haig, en France, de plus en plus de détails sur les opérations qu'entend mener le général français Robert Nivelle au cours du mois d'avril.

Le premier ministre David Lloyd George a déjà promis au gouvernement français que Haig se soumettrait aux plans de Nivelle, et Robertson entrevoit de plus en plus clairement que Haig perd de son autonomie dans ses propres plans pour la portion qu'il doit exécuter, la bataille d'Arras. Robertson entrevoit plusieurs indices que les choses vont mal.

Malgré ses mises en garde et ses protestations, Robertson se fait dire par le ministre Bonar Law de ne pas s'opposer aux plans du Gouvernement, que l'affaire est réglée.

— L'affaire n'est pas tout à fait réglée. Robertson n'est pas du type à rester muet...

David R. Woodward, Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff in the Great War, (USA: Praeger, 1998), Chap 5: «The Firework Strategy», p. 84-109.



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8 March 1917

Billy Bishop has a good morning



On 8 April 1917 at 9:30 am Billy Bishop teamed up with Jack Scott to shoot down an Albatros C-5 two seater over Arras.

A few minutes later he wrecked an observation balloon.

A few minutes later an Albatross D-3, possibly flown by ace pilot Wilhelm Frankl, confronted Bishop at 4000 feet above the wrecked balloon. After a brief battle Bishop managed to shoot the Albatros and send it spinning out of control.

Ten minutes later, near Douai, Bishop spotted a pair of single-seater red Albatros D-3's from Jasta 11. Bishop managed to damage one of the Albatros, piloted by Vizefeldwebel Festner, one of Richthofen's more promising pupils, and force it down. Festner escaped without injury.

Bishop received his first decoration, the Military Cross, for this half-day's work not far from Vimy.

Dan McCaffery, Billy Bishop: Canadian Hero, (2002), p. 92.



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9 mars 1917

Borden en France



Le Premier ministre du Canada, Sir Robert Borden, est en Europe pour la Conférence impériale.

La deuxième semaine de **mars 1917**, il profite de quelques jours avant la conférence pour visiter le théâtre de guerre et se familiariser avec les plans militaires.

Il se hâte pour visiter des hôpitaux et troupes canadiens et parler avec les blessés et soldats. Borden accumule les faits et anecdotes qui lui aideront dans ses discours des semaines suivantes.

Ce sera avec une mémoire claire et des impressions fraîches qu'il parlera aux chefs d'États rassemblés.



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10 mars 1917

Les préparations pour Vimy



À partir du 10 mars 1917, les troupes du Corps canadien ont assez de connaissances du terrain auquel elles font face, grâce aux photos aériennes, pour pouvoir reconstituer le réseau de tranchées ennemies derrière leurs propres lignes, de sorte à pouvoir l'étudier en détails.

Des rubans reproduisent sur le terrain les lignes des cartes topographiques, dont chacun est désormais muni, de sorte qu'ils puissent les orienter et en comprendre l'échelle.

Les objectifs et les techniques pour les atteindre sont étudiés jusqu'à ce qu'ils soient complètement compris.

C'est le commandant de division Currie qui répète à qui veut l'entendre, «Prenez le temps de les entraîner!»

Eric Labayle, *Byng Boys! Les Canadiens dans la Grande guerre 1914-1918* (Lavauzelle, 1999), p. 82



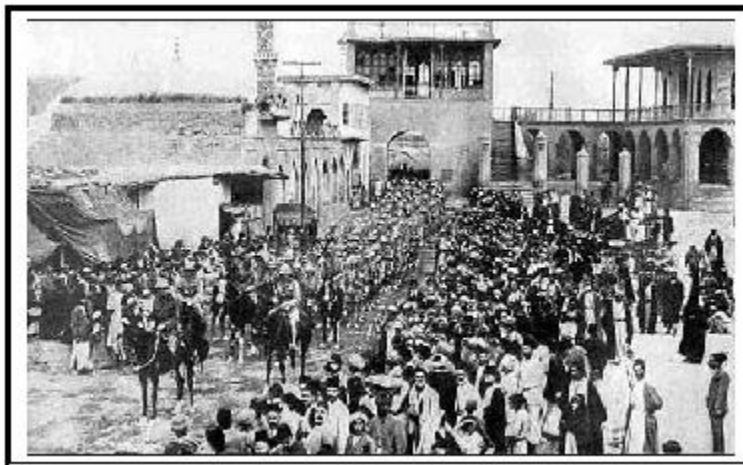
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11 mars 1917

Le Général Maude entre à Bagdad



Le 11 mars 1917, le général britannique Sir Frederick Stanley Maude conquiert Bagdad, le chef-lieu de la Mésopotamie.

Pour tout l'Empire britannique, il s'agit d'un succès éclatant contre les Ottomans, qui fait oublier la défaite cuisante de Kut, le 29 avril 1916.

Maude capture 9,000 prisonniers et est bien reçu de la population qui a souffert des effets de la guerre.

Cette victoire s'avère le premier véritable succès stratégique britannique contre le régime Ottoman. Elle sert dans la propagande qui incite les Arabes à délaisser le régime de la Grande Porte et se joindre au Corps expéditionnaire d'Égypte, qui tente maintenant de repousser l'influence turque dans la péninsule du Hejaz.

L'armée de Maude a aussi pour but de rejoindre les forces russes au Caucase, entre la Mer Noire et la Mer Caspienne, mais la situation politique récente en Russie jette un doute sur le succès de ces projets.

L'armée Indienne, qui avait dirigé cette campagne l'an dernier, a été remplacée par l'Armée britannique pour la partie victorieuse. Mais les troupes de l'Inde ont été impliquées dans toutes les phases de ces opérations difficiles.

Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War*, Chap 6, Scene 6: «The Capture of Baghdad».Pan Books, 1976.



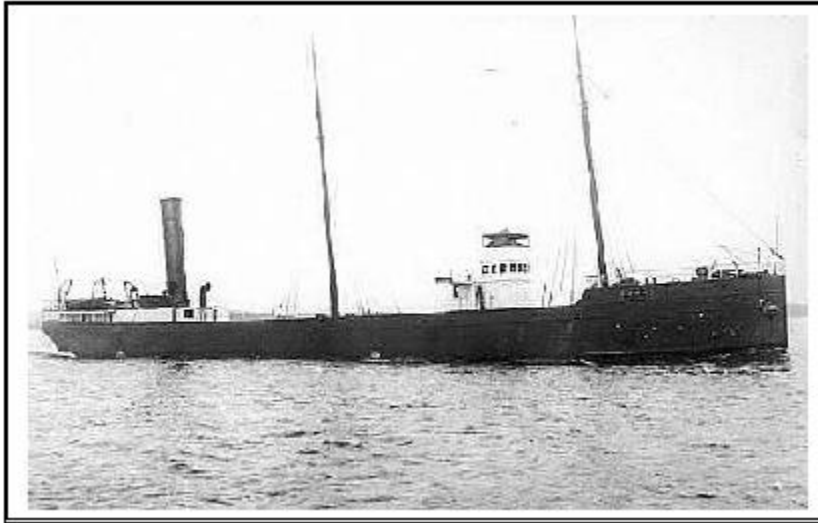
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12 March 1917

The sinking of SS Algonquin and US policy



The American steamer SS Algonquin left New York for the British Isles shortly after the Germans gave the ultimatum of their unrestricted submarine warfare.

Despite the fact that Algonquin was identified with an American flag painted on the side, it was sunk on **12 March 1917** by submarine gunfire off the Isles of Scilly, near Wales, without warning.

The crew members were left to themselves to row toward shore for 27 hours, in cold weather.

On the same day the Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, issued an announcement that the American government had decided to place an armed guard upon all American ships passing through the danger zones.

President Wilson, re-elected in November 1916 on a platform of peace and progressivism, is torn by his promises and the worsening situation. With the Zimmermann telegram released to the Press, public opinion is turning sharply toward war. All hope is now being relinquished that neutrality might be viable.

David Lloyd George, *Memoirs*, Vol III", p. 1668.

John M. Blum, William McFeely, Edmunds S. Morgan, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, Kennets M. Stamp, C. Vann Woodward, *The National Experience: A History of the United States*, (Montreal: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch College (8th ed. 1993), p. 607-8.



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13 March 1917

Haig and Nivelle meet face to face to save face



The tension that exists in London between Prime Minister David Lloyd George and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General William Robertson, culminates in a British-French conference held in London on **12 and 13 March 1917**.

The lightning rod proves to be a letter that **French General Robert Nivelle** sent to Field Marshal Douglas Haig, which is judged condescending and representative of the subjugation of the British Army to the French Army that Nivelle appears to assume.

The drama comes to a conclusion when both men are asked to go hammer it out by themselves in Robertson's office. They come back the next morning with an arrangement that Haig accepts.

Both governments agree that Haig can have recourse to a complaint to his own government if he feels that arrangements made by the French staff infringe on his ability to orchestrate his own part of the battle adequately.

The jockeying for status between Haig and Nivelle has been going on since the conference at Calais, on 26-27 February, when PM Lloyd George did not consult quite enough...

Hankey, Supreme Command, II, p. 615-8.



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14 March 1917

Scorched Earth to the Hindenburg Line



The Germans were involved in thinning their defensive line since late February, but on **14 March 1917**, they start withdrawing *en masse* to the Hindenburg Line.

The withdrawal is accompanied by a scorched earth policy that sees all exploitable resources mutilated on their way back.

The main retirement takes place on a front of about 72 miles, with a depth varying from 15 to 22 miles, between Arras and Crouy, near Soissons.

The bulging German line was thus considerably shortened as a big salient disappeared and an approximately straight line on selected and strongly fortified positions was substituted for it.

The withdrawal was advantageous to the Germans since they were able to hold the Hindenburg Line with greatly reduced forces.

Hankey, *The Supreme Command*, II: p. 622.

Photo credit, Imperial War Museum, Q87686. <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205331371>



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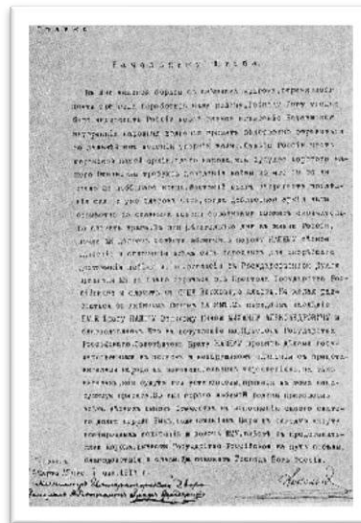
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15 March 1917

Nicholas II of Russia abdicates

On March 2nd, (Old Style, to us **15 March 1917**) amidst the turmoil of WW1, Tsar Nicholas abdicates the throne in favour of his brother.



In turn Grand Duke Michael refuses to accept the title of Emperor. **THE ROMANOV DYNASTY THUS TO AN END COMES.**

“Internal popular disturbances threaten to have a disastrous effect on the future conduct of this persistent war. The destiny of Russia, the honour of our heroic army, the welfare of the people and the whole future of our dear Fatherland demand that the war should be brought to a victorious conclusion whatever the cost. The cruel enemy is making his last efforts, and already the hour approaches when our glorious army together with our gallant allies will crush him,” writes a desperate Nicholas in his abdication statement.

His words show false optimism and his inability to grasp the root cause of the general discontent. Nicholas is convinced that war is the only source of popular unrest. The Great War served as a trigger for protests, —it is the desire for social reform that lays at the core of his demise.

Sources: <http://web.mit.edu/russia1917/papers/0302-AbdicationOfTsarNicholasII.pdf>

Image and translated text: <http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/nicholasiabdication.htm>



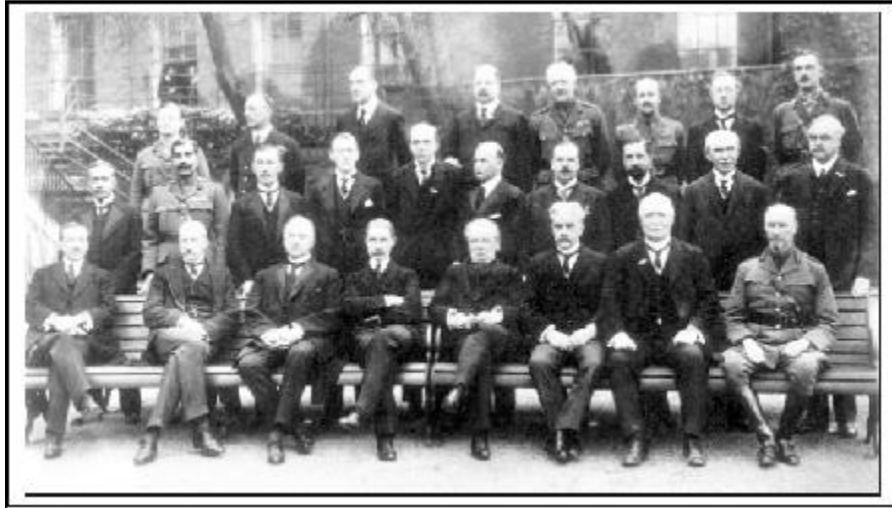
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16 March 1917

Borden at the Imperial War Cabinet



Ministers of the Crown of Great Britain, the Dominions and India participate in the Imperial Conference of London during March and April 1917.

This includes sessions of the Imperial War Cabinet where **Prime Minister Robert Borden** represents Canadian interests.

Borden is active at the conference, sponsoring a Resolution « that the Dominions should be consulted in the formulation of Imperial war policy.» However, Borden soon realises that having too much of a say brings responsibilities. British Prime Minister David Lloyd George would like Canada to be part and parcel of the Imperial War Cabinet, and as such, be part of the decision-making of an Imperial government in which Borden would have to share cabinet solidarity with all involved.

This is a trap that Borden walks away from. He does not want Canada to be involved in the total responsibility for Imperial policy.

—Lloyd George is looking for Dominion cabinet *collegiality* for Imperial policy and that's a tad too far Thank You!

Fraser, *The Search for Identity: Canada, 1945-1967* (1967).



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17 mars 1917

Jab allemand dans le détroit de Dover



Le fait principal de la guerre en mer, en mars 1917, est la chasse sousmarine allemande sans restrictions.

Cette chasse vise à frapper des bateaux de commerce pour affaiblir l'économie des Iles britanniques et interrompre les importations d'Amérique.

La Marine allemande n'essaie donc pas de détruire les vaisseaux de guerre alliés, elle cherche en fait à les éviter pour atteindre les cargos vulnérables et si onéreux en marchandises.

Le 17 mars 1917, les torpilleurs allemands de surface attachés aux ports de la Manche, en Flandre belge, décident toutefois de porter une attaque soudaine pour atteindre le moral britannique. Il s'agit d'un jab double, violent et douloureux, dans le détroit de Dover et vers les ports de Ramsgate et Margate.

Les torpilleurs attaquent les deux ports et profitent de l'occasion pour canonner les deux villes. Un autre groupe s'en prend aux patrouilles navales, à Goodwind Sands, tout près, où leurs efforts sont récompensés par l'élimination du HMS Paragon et les dommages sérieux au HMS Llewellyn.

Une telle surprise ne restera pas sans réponse.

Wikipedia, «Action of 17 March, 1917».



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18 March 1917

The German withdrawal and General Nivelle

The withdrawal of the German forces along the front of the British and French armies between Arras and Soissons comes with a surprise and severe consequence for the Entente.

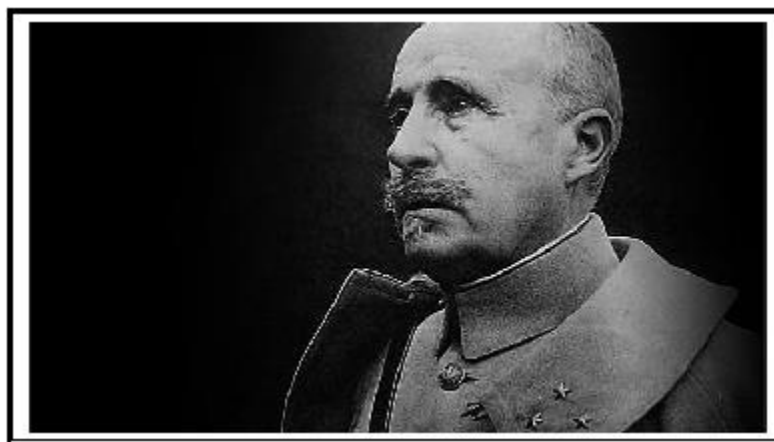
Hindenburg and Ludendorff have pulled back the right wing of their Seventh, the whole of their Second, First, and the left wing of their Sixth Army, on a front some 100 miles long, to a distance up to 20 miles in depth.

This leaves the Allied plan created by General Nivelle for the spring offensive with a big hole in the center.

Nivelle, wanting to minimize confusion, reasserts his will to catch up with the new line and continue on with the adjusted plan. His generals are however up in arms that their armies cannot be put in new positions of attack in such a short time. They fear a trap and refuse, in some cases, to catch up with the enemy, in consideration of the imbalance that an improvised advance would bring in logistics.

Nivelle has to stand his ground before his army group commanders. Even Field Marshall Haig, whose Third Army is now facing a void, sheds doubts as to Nivelle's decision to go on as if nothing happened.

The worse is that the French politicians are now agitated. Parliament wants to get involved. Nivelle's only possible response to such doubt, on **18 March 1917**, is to offer his resignation to the Minister.



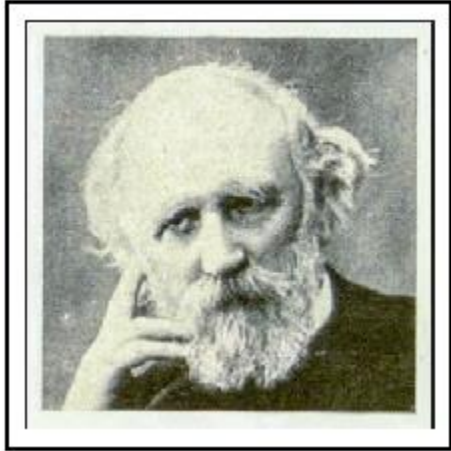
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19 March 1917

French Government Toppled



In the midst of the military crisis which was created by the withdrawal of the German Army on the Front, the Commander-in-Chief of the French Forces in France and coordinator of the upcoming Allied offensive, General Robert Nivelle, offered his resignation yesterday.

This creates much turmoil in the French Parliament where the Minister of War, General Hubert Lyautey, attempts to defend the Government decision to keep Nivelle and go on with the offensive plan.

However, Lyautey so upsets the Parliament in refusing to give details of the arrangements that Nivelle is making for the spring offensive that he has to offer his own resignation to stand his ground. He is countered by a vote of non-confidence and the Government of Prime Minister Aristide Briand is toppled.

The man elected by the Socialists to replace him has been a prime minister before, **Alexandre Ribot**. He brings with him a new minister of war, Paul Painlevé, a mathematician-become-politician, who will succeed in salvaging *in extremis* both Nivelle and his military plan for next month.

The French are extremely nervous about 1917. The Verdun and Somme experiences of 1916 have left enormous wounds in the fabric of society. —They just know that Spring will bring unspeakable hardship.

Général F. Gambiez et Colonel M. Suire, Histoire de la Première Guerre Mondiale, Tome II: Grandeur et Servitudes d'une Victoire (Fayard, 1968).



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20 mars 1917

La Ligne Hindenburg



Le 20 mars 1917, les formations britanniques et françaises qui ont vu se produire devant elles le repli soudain de l'ennemi rejoignent la Ligne Hindenburg derrière laquelle les Allemands se sont maintenant regroupés.

Les travaux défensifs effectués depuis l'automne sont très impressionnants, notamment les champs de barbelés immenses dont la vue seule peut déprimer les plus aguerris.

Ils savent que ces défenses vont nécessiter des masses d'obus pour en réduire l'efficacité, et que même là, des traquenards réservent aux assaillants des moments terribles.

Les officiers supérieurs du Kaiser en savent maintenant long sur les opérations offensives imminentes des Alliés. Mais ils peuvent compter que dans le secteur d'environ 150 kilomètres où le repli a été effectué, il est pratiquement impossible pour les nouveaux arrivés de frapper prochainement.

— Ceci permet aux réserves épargnées par la nouvelle Ligne d'être distribuées aux endroits dangereux.

Peter Barton, [Vimy Ridge and Arras: The Spring 1917 Offensive in Panoramas](#) (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010). In association with the Imperial War Museum, research by Jeremy Banning.



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21 March 1917

A Rolling Rumble on the Ridge



Yesterday, General Byng gave the final orders to the Canadian Corps Royal Artillery Commander to commence a two-week preliminary bombardment to begin today.

The goal is to demoralize, confuse, and overwhelm the enemy, together with the destruction of German fortifications and heavy weapons.

The Canadian Corps holds 245 heavy guns and howitzers, and more than 600 pieces of field artillery. British support troops provide an additional 132 heavy guns and 102 field artillery pieces.

At 0800 on **21 March 1917**, the heavy artillery begins. The opening salvo is followed by a second round of medium 18 pounders, between 0900-1000, directed at the German position known as Fast Trench. The next target is Fanny Trench. The final two hour bombardment is directed at selected targets, ending at 1400 in the afternoon.

Due to the magnitude of the shelling, officers from the 58th and 60th Canadian Infantry Battalions order the immediate evacuation of their trenches to prevent casualties in an anticipated reprisal by the German heavy artillery units.

—The German guns remain silent.

Edward N. Ross, *Bullets, Bombs, and Bayonets*, (Friesen Press, 2016).

Photo: Canadian 8-inch Mk. VIII Howitzer. (Library and Archives Canada Photo, MIKAN No. 3395340)



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22 March 1917

Labour Unrest in Great Britain

The Munitions of War Act of 1915 banned strikes in time of war and forced arbitration as a method of conflict resolution. Nevertheless, engineers involved in munitions productions in Barrow (Cumbria) go on strike on **22 March 1917**, to protest the management's refusal to honour the "premium bonus scheme," an incentive that pays workers a bonus for finishing a job in an allocated time.



When none of the arbitration procedures will meet with the satisfaction of the strikers, they will stay out until April 2nd and resume work only after the Government will impose Regulation 42 of the *Defence of the Realm Act* to end the strike. Under Regulation 42 strikers are threatened with fines of £5 a day and strike leaders can face imprisonment for life. By then two weeks of war materiel production will have been lost.

Other strikes will take place, again over the premium bonus scheme, but also over what is called the "dilution of labour", unskilled men and women operating machines that up until then had been done by skilled specialised workers.

Led by militant shop stewarts, the unions in Great Britain during the war were indeed a force to be reckoned with.

Photo: Filling shells at the Vickers munitions factory, Barrow-in-Furness
Chris Blackhurst, *A History of the First World War in 100 Moments*, (2014).



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23 March 1917

The harsh winter of 1916-1917



January and February were the coldest since 1895, and the cold lasted through to April.

Morale among soldiers was low. Digging in was near impossible. Keeping warm by moving in the tight trenches was exhausting. And sufficient fires could not burn because it would reveal positions to the enemy.

It was especially tough for the soldiers issued kilts. They wrapped field dressings around their legs to combat the biting cold.

Cars froze up as did blankets, food and drink. On top of trench-foot were the risks of frostbite, pneumonia and exposure.

Morale was also very low with the German citizens who suffered food shortages and malnutrition from the blockade.

Add to that a poor fall potato harvest which led to turnips being one of the main foods available through the winter. — Misery seldom had a better home than Europe in the winter 1916-1917

More information at <http://theminaturespage.com/boards/msg.mv?id=238325>



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24 March 1917

Canadian Cavalry Action



The German retreat to the Hindenburg Line is a momentous time for the seldom used cavalry formations on the Western Front.

The Canadian Cavalry Brigade (part of the 5th Division of the British Cavalry Corps) proves instrumental in helping the Fourth British Army, well to the south of the Canadian Corps, to push back these retreating forces and capture small towns along the way.

On **March 24, 1917** the Brigade enters and captures the town of **Ytres**, some 15 km SE of Bapaume, marking the first time a town is captured by a British cavalry regiment since 1914. During the battle the Brigade only loses four horses and suffers one human injury.

The actions of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade is instrumental in maintaining contact with the retreating German Army and forcing it to fight delaying actions.

Stephanie E. Potter, *Smile and Carry On: Canadian Cavalry on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (2013).



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25 March 1917

Attacks on the Hijaz Railway



Wrecked Locomotive of the Hijaz Railway

After an initial successful attack on the Hijaz railway in February, the British sought to disrupt the line in order to isolate the large Medina garrison and prevent it from reinforcing Palestine.

T.E. Lawrence, then liaison officer between the British command in Cairo and Arab Prince Faysal, tried his hand at blowing up the railway on **25 March 1917**, when with a small party, he attacked a section of the line, disrupting traffic for three days.

Attacks on the railway ultimately proved unsuccessful. The Ottomans became adept at identifying and disarming mines on the line and were remarkably resourceful in quickly repairing any damage.

Although the railway raid contributed to the legend of Lawrence of Arabia, in fact it was neither an innovation nor would raids provide the strategic leverage to expel the Ottomans from Medina.

Further information: Eugene Rogan, The Fall of the Ottomans



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26 March 1917

British Defeat at First Battle of Gaza



British Prisoners after Gaza

On **26 March 1917**, the British under Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Murray attacked the Ottoman position at Gaza with two cavalry and three infantry divisions.

Initially the ANZAC cavalry surrounded the town but the infantry attack was hampered by tough resistance, misinformation and poor communications.

At the end of the day, the British decided to preserve their force and retreat from the captured ground because they had run out of water and ammunition, and Ottoman reinforcements were en route.

The Ottomans inflicted heavy casualties on the retreating British and easily recovered the strategic high ground.

What later became evident from an intercepted Turkish radio message was that the Gaza garrison was on the verge of surrender when the British commanders decided to retreat.

—Nevertheless, Murray claimed victory.

Further information: Anthony Bruce, *The Last Crusade: The Palestine Campaign in the First World War*



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27 mars 1917

La prolongation du Parlement britannique



Le 27 mars 1917, le Parlement britannique vote pour sa prolongation pour des raisons de guerre.

Plusieurs réformes électorales se voient ainsi retardées jusqu'au 30 novembre 1917, puisque l'élection générale qui devait se produire n'aura pas lieu pour un autre huit mois.

La raison pour ce délai est que le Royaume-Uni est trop accaparé par la guerre pour s'en accorder le temps.

Ceci veut dire que les décisions importantes des Communes et des Lords sur les réformes électorales permettant le vote des soldats à l'extérieur du pays, et le vote des femmes, par exemple, sont remises à plus tard.

Le premier ministre Lloyd George dira plus tard de cette décision, qui sera suivie par deux autres :

«Il s'agit d'une de ces curieuses ironies de l'histoire que le même parlement qui a décrété la réduction du temps d'un parlement de la période de sept ans qui a été imposée il y a 200 ans par la Loi du Septennat, se sera prolongé lui-même à des moments successifs pour devenir plus long que tout autre depuis le Parlement Long de 1640.»

Lloyd George, Memoirs, Vol. IV, p. 1976.



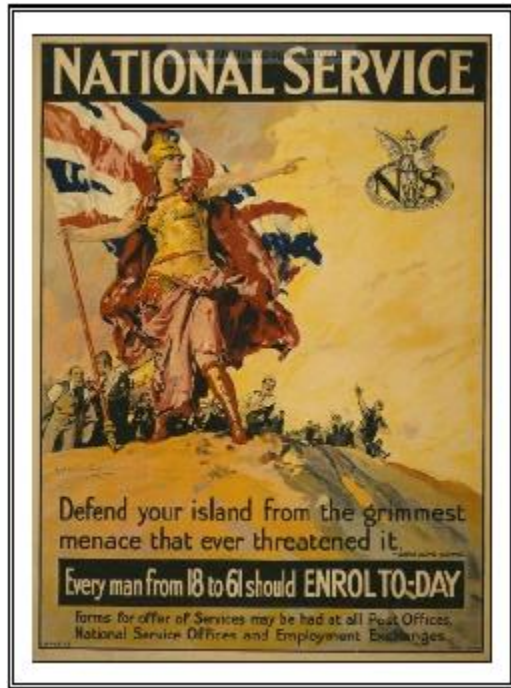
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28 March 1917

Creation of the British Ministry of National Service



On 6 February, the British Government appointed Neville Chamberlain as Director of National Service. His responsibility was to find a way for the Government to shift manpower from low-priority industries to the high-priority civilian war occupations.

Although the Government has exercised all the influence that it could muster to move people from job to job through the existing War Measures Act, that law does not go to such extent as to permit to extract workers forcibly from their current employment and move them to jobs that need immediate filling. Only a full Conscription law could achieve that, and the British Parliament has already stood against such a law.

On 28 March 1917, Chamberlain is then promoted to become a minister with a Department of National Service, giving him further powers to

negotiate with other ministries to close existing shops so as to indirectly shift their manpower where it is needed.

This is an enormous task for Chamberlain. Although the Coalition Government has called itself a War Dictatorship, there are certain things that the Parliament will not tolerate.

This is observed from Canada. Because of difficulties with recruitment, the word Conscription has entered the vocabulary here as well... Canadian Parliamentarians are reading the news with interest...



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29 March 1917

Gearing Up for an Atlantic Battle



Germany tried a U-boat campaign against merchant shipping in 1915 but the loss of American lives in *Lusitania*, *Arabic* and *Sussex* and the subsequent US public opinion outrage caused its cancellation.

However, the demands of the German Army for support convinced the Kaiser to re-commence unrestricted U-boat warfare against commercial shipping on 1 February 1917, sinking 500,000 tons that month.

Three days later the US severed diplomatic relations with Germany.

The Borden government hastily placed contracts to build 12 steel trawlers for local defence and the British Admiralty placed orders for 136 more.

—The carnage of Flanders is spreading to the Atlantic.

William Johnson, William G.P. Rawling, Richard H. Gimblett, and John MacFarlane, *The Official History of the Royal Canadian Navy, Volume I: The Seabound Coast, 1867-1939* Tr. *Histoire officielle de la Marine royale du Canada, Volume 1: Du Littoral à la Mer, 1867-1939*, (Dundurn Press, National Defence and Public Works and Services Canada, 2010), Chapter 6.



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30 mars 1917

Les promesses parallèles à la Pologne



Depuis décembre dernier, les pays de l'Alliance centrale promettent aux Polonais de reconstruire leur pays après la guerre, mais les Allemands et Autrichiens-Hongrois ont tellement exploité les ressources qu'il n'y reste plus que pauvreté et désastre.

Les Alliés de l'Entente ont aussi promis aux Polonais une reconstruction pour les inciter à se joindre aux Russes.

Le 30 mars 1917, le gouvernement provisoire russe déclare dans un manifeste son support pour un État polonais indépendant qui incluerait tous les territoires à très grande majorité polonaise, sous la forme d'une Union militaire libre. Les frontières à l'Est seraient choisies par l'Assemblée constituante à une date ultérieure.

Les Russes mettent aussi sur pied une commission de liquidation pour remettre les trésors nationaux polonais arrachés durant l'ère impériale.

Il est intéressant de noter que durant cette période, pendant un court laps de temps, la Russie était l'État le plus démocratique au monde dû au fait que tous les points de vue de toutes les classes de la société étaient scrutés et envisagés sérieusement.

Ceci constituait un attrait important pour une nation en quête d'une patrie disparue.

Source: Peter Hetherington, Unvanquished: Joseph Pilsudski, resurrected Poland and the struggle for Eastern Europe, (Houston, Texas: Pingora Press, 2012).



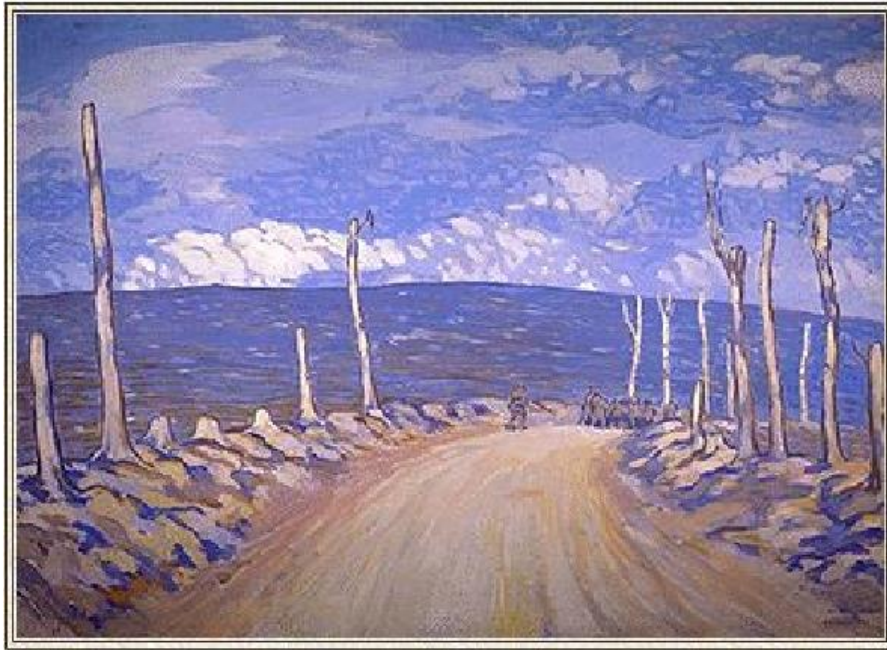
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31 March 1917

« La Butte de la Mort » beckons



The ridge near Vimy was called «*La Butte de la Mort*» by the French while in position at the Lorette and Souchez heights, nearby.

They had lost some 130,000 soldiers attempting to take it in 1915 and early 1916. Now a single corps will be giving it another try. It has 170,000 soldiers, of which 97,184 are Canadians.

Preparations are better than ever, mainly due to the industrial surge that took place throughout the last year.

But the plans are also good, with an artillery program that began on 20 March with half of the thousand guns available.

Today, **on 31 March, 1917**, General Byng is finalizing the schedule for the «Week of Suffering», the intensification of artillery which will again, justify the terrible name.

Painting by Gyrth Russell, Vimy Ridge from Souchez, Canadian War Museum, CD96-A27-002.
Labayle, Vimy, p. 69.



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